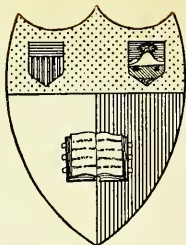


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QUEST AND VISION

ESSAYS IN LIFE AND LITERATURE

BY

W. J. DAWSON

AUTHOR OF

The Church of To-morrow

This music crept by me upon the waters,
Allaying both their fury and my passion
With its sweet air; thence I have followed it,
Or it hath drawn me rather :—but 'tis gone.
No, it begins again!—*Tempest, Act I, Scene 2*



NEW YORK: HUNT & EATON
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ART AND TRUTH.

THE weary years, the summer's gold,
Man's feverish joy and pain,
Pass like a dream, and all grows old :
Tell me, what things remain ?

Two names alone, and Truth is one :
A face inscrutable,
With lips that neither laugh nor moan,
Yet all things have to tell.

And Art the other : at the gate
Of her old Paradise,
Whoe'er shall come, or soon or late,
She opens to the wise.

We fade and pass : we fret our days
In barren love and strife ;
But happier he who only prays
Beneath the Tree of Life.

SHELLEY.

MR. RUSSELL LOWELL has used an admirable phrase about Wordsworth which is worthy of reproduction ; he has spoken of his "almost irritating respectability." Why respectability on the part of a poet should be irritating it is difficult to say, unless it be that the conventional tradition of poets is precisely the reverse of respectable. Poets, from Homer downward, have been more or less at variance with average society. They have not belonged to the sober, tax-paying, owe-no-man-any-thing type of humanity. Respectable citizens have habitually held them in suspicion, as persons of uncertain character, and presenting to the common eye no visible means of support. The Act of Parliament which reckoned the actor a vagabond marked the apotheosis of respectability, its concrete utterance, its definite and unalterable verdict upon all classes of men who live by the exercise or cultivation of the imaginative powers. One of the facts which philosophic moralists have to deal with

is that, more often than not, men of imaginative genius have been open transgressors of the received laws and traditions of society. One has but to mention Burns, Byron, and Shelley—the three most commanding influences in the poetry of the century—in order to realize how grave a problem this presents. In each case we have the spectacle of immense genius allied to imperfect morals, and in the latter instances, not merely the outrage, but the defiance of morals. It is surely, therefore, a charming stroke of humor or satire that when at last there is vouchsafed to us a poet of unquestioned respectability, who actually knew how to collect taxes as well as pay them, who was in private life the most sober and decent of citizens, we straightway rebuke him for not being a chartered libertine, like the rest of his craft. Society, having constructed an ideal of what a poet is—namely, all that he should not be—expects every poet to conform to that most improper tradition. A poet without improprieties has no piquancy, and his very respectability becomes irritating. Thus is the poet impaled upon the horns of a most unjust dilemma: if vicious, he is a scandal; if virtuous, a bore.

We all remember the story of Theodore Hook being asked at a dinner-party, by an eager admirer of ten, when he was going to be funny. The question must have probed deep into the sore heart of Hook. There he sat, weighed down with bitter thoughts and shameful memories, in his brain madness, in his heart blackness and decay, only too conscious of the old age that made itself felt beneath the "padding and washings," of the eclipse that was fast stealing upon his wit, of the hollowness of that bubble reputation he had made; and then came this tiny questioner, with no cruelty in his childish heart, asking him when he was going to begin to be funny! Was not that dinner the price paid for his jests? Had he not for years let himself out at that price to whosoever would? The jester must needs jest, though his heart be breaking; the actor who has just looked into the open coffin must nevertheless rush hither and thither in the farce, and say comic things in his funniest manner; it is no concern of society's that Hook is broken-hearted. There is no tyranny so cruel, and often so absurd, as the tyranny of tradition. This little story about Hook has many wide

and obvious applications. The man who is celebrated as a wit must be funny on pain of extinction ; a flash of silence is not permitted him ; he is dragged at the heels of his own reputation, and cannot escape.

The class of men society has been pleased to identify as poets must, in similar fashion, abide by the traditional ideal society has set up. The actor may purge himself and his calling, and live in perfect nobility of life ; but the mass of men will still persist in regarding him as an immoral person, whom the law recognizes as a vagrant ; and to the vulgar mind the poet will still remain a person of unsound and unsafe life. You cannot persuade society that you are not what the tradition of your calling says you are ; and the attempt only results in irritation and defiance.

As there is nothing more tyrannous, so there is nothing more unjust and even capricious, than the action of society toward its men of genius. It sets up one man and puts down another without adequate reason, or any reason at all. What it cheerfully condones in one it shrieks itself hoarse over in another. The temper of society toward social

offenses is an unknown quantity ; no one can with safety calculate the chances. It is just as likely that the daring social iconoclast will become famous as infamous by his iconoclasm ; between celebrity and ostracism there is but a step. Society has no settled decalogue, no Code Napoleon, no fixed standard of conduct by which the iconoclast may measure his position or estimate his peril. It is more often than not governed by the fitfulness of chance opinion, and is drifted along the tide of mere circumstance. No better instance of this peculiarity can be found than in the relative treatment of Byron and Shelley. Both poets outraged the traditions of society in the same direction, but with difference of degree. The balance of degree would be in favor of Byron and against Shelley. Byron never professed himself an atheist, but Shelley did, and wrote a blasphemous poem in favor of atheism. Byron never promulgated perilous doctrines of free love, but Shelley dedicated his life to their promulgation and shaped his conduct upon them. Much as may be laid at Byron's door, nothing baser can be alleged of him than the story too well proved of Shelley's treatment of Har-

riety Westbrook. Byron's profligacy was the coarse and commonplace sort of profligacy that thousands of men of fashion in his own time and our time are guilty of. It would have passed unnoticed in a period so corrupt as the period of the regency but that he himself chose to publish it, to magnify it, and to gloat over it. Shelley was a sensualist, but not a profligate. He was as eager to blazon his sensualism as Byron his profligacy. In one of his longest and finest poems he approves of and glorifies incest. The difference between Byron's and Shelley's treatment of passion is that one treats it with coarse realism, while the other invests it with a subtle glamour. Byron knows he is wicked, and his transgression is ever before him; Shelley acknowledges no sin, and stands naked but not ashamed in his misdoing. The verdict of society upon the pair is one of the most anomalous in the history of literature. Byron is dismissed as a monster; Shelley has been recognized by one of his latest students as one who, under favoring circumstances, might have been the saviour of the world.

Not long since a poor woman, an habitual

drunkard, informed a magistrate that she believed she had no soul. She was an exception to the entire human race; she was destitute of what every other human being possessed. It was a flash of grim bitterness; the humiliation of despair could sink no lower. Let us for a moment try to conceive the possibility of such error on the part of the Creator; what sort of tragic abortion would this solitary soulless creature be? Certainly no despairing creature. Not having a soul, she would not feel the need of one, or be able to realize its existence. She would be destitute of conscience and moral sense. Things morally abhorrent would present no repulsiveness to such a being; the foul would simply be a different sort of fair; good and evil, hallowed and unhallowed, pure and infamous things would present merely so many interesting phenomena, and would be regarded with the same impassive curiosity. The proportion of moral things would be lost, or rather would never have existed. It would be vain to expect moral conduct from such a being; impulse and desire would be the only guides of conduct. The just laws which regulated ordinary mortals

would naturally appear a useless and cumbersome tyranny. To admit such a being into the society of ordinary creatures would constitute a constant peril. What safeguard would there be for the preservation of honor, truth, or chastity in the presence of one who was devoid of that primal sense which comprehends what these abstractions mean? Thus one might push the speculation in many directions, and arrive at various grotesque and tragic deductions. A powerful imagination might so treat this conception in the realms of fiction as perhaps to make it one of the most fascinating of literary studies.

It is far from me to describe Shelley as a man without a soul, but if one can conceive a great poet almost destitute of all but rudimentary moral sense Shelley might very well embody the conception. Let any one take the extraordinary story of his conduct to Harriet Westbrook, Mary Godwin, and Jane Clairmont, or rather the portion of the story which belongs to the relation of the three women to each other. He leaves Harriet for no tangible reason except that he has discovered she is only a "noble animal," who does not properly

share his poetic sentiments. He then induces, with great difficulty, Mary Godwin, a girl just over sixteen, to leave her father's house with him. When they fly he is not content to rob Godwin of Mary, but actually takes Claire with them also, apparently for no other reason than that she would be an interesting companion. Then, to complete matters, when he has lived a few weeks with Mary, and under the same roof with Claire, he writes the forsaken Harriet a long and loving letter, suggesting that she shall join them, that they may all be happy together. On his return to London he visits Harriet as if nothing had happened, and thinks it would at least be a very admirable arrangement for Harriet and Mary to know each other. He aids and abets Claire in becoming the mistress of Lord Byron. Finally, within less than three weeks after the body of Harriet Westbrook has been found in the Serpentine, Shelley has married Mary Godwin.

If such a net-work of episode as this were introduced in fiction every critic in the kingdom would declaim against the monstrous improbability of the plot. One can very well fancy the sort of review that would be written.

“Before the author of this volume takes another flight in fiction,” we can hear the wise reviewer saying, “it will perhaps be well for him to consider the following observations: Seduction is unfortunately not uncommon, but young men of two-and-twenty do not frequently forsake their wives after two years of marriage, under plea of incompatibility of literary taste, and straightway seduce girls of sixteen while sharing their fathers’ hospitality. When a man is base enough to seduce a young girl he does not usually invite her sister to accompany her in her flight from her father’s house, that she may become a daily witness of her shame. Neither is it common for such a man to wish his deserted wife to live with his mistress and to connive in bringing to shame the sister of the mistress he has abducted. And it may, perhaps, have come within the knowledge of the author of this book, in his observation of society, that even the most hardened of profligates would be slow to outrage public decency to the extent of marrying his mistress in less than three weeks from the day on which his wife has committed suicide. There is a secrecy in vice, a certain honor in

passion, a decency in sensuality, which forbid such acts as these. Only a delirious fancy could invent them and a morbid mind conceive them. We beg to assure the author that in real life such things do not occur," etc. To do justice to the novelists, it may be said that no novelist has yet invented such a plot as this. But this is the clear, truthful, and unbiased statement of what Shelley actually did. He does not appear to have realized that there was any incongruity, any unreasonableness, or still less any shamefulness, in his conduct. There was no malicious wit in his letter to Harriet ; he sincerely imagined he had invented an admirable arrangement for the comfort of all parties when he invited her to live with Mary and Claire. On his part it was simple obtuseness, the entire lack of common perception. There is no sign that he recognized either the absurdity or wickedness of his proposals, that he even experienced any contrition or remorse for the wreck of Claire's life or the death of Harriet. Byron had too keen a sense of the ridiculous ever to have been involved in such an imbroglio as this, and too great a faculty for remorse not to have suffered bitterly

in its contemplation. But to all this Shelley was indifferent ; he looked upon it, but there was no speculation in those orbs. He went placidly on his way wrecking and destroying the lives of others as a child might amuse himself in a garden by trampling down the rarest flowers, in pure gayety, and with no knowledge of the damage he was doing. Is not the most charitable assumption in such a case that the wrecker is morally insane, that he is deficient in, or destitute of, all that constitutes the moral sense ?

The most remarkable circumstance about the moral errors of Shelley is not so much his own indifference to them as the indifference of his contemporaries and critics. In one sense his contemporaries were not indifferent ; undoubtedly Shelley did enough to make many people dread his influence and hate his name. He tells us that in Rome he was regarded by all who knew or heard of him as a rare prodigy of crime and pollution, whose very look might infect. But, nevertheless, there was a curious purity about Shelley, the existence and depth of which was recognized by those who knew him best. Byron said he was the purest man

he ever met. Byron may not be the best witness on such a subject, but Leigh Hunt, at all events, is a most respectable witness—a man of conventional ideas on all subjects except the financial obligations of literary men—and there is plenty of evidence that Shelley impressed him in precisely the same way. Hazlitt did not like Shelley, but the worst thing he can say about him is that he has a maggot in his brain, a hectic flush, a shrill voice, and the general aspect of a religious fanatic. With all the new weight of evidence which Mr. Jeaffreson has accumulated and the malicious ingenuity with which he has applied it, it is impossible to believe that Shelley was actuated in his relations with women by the brutal selfishness and coarse passion of the ordinary beguiler of the sex. He was as completely sincere in his advocacy of the free contract and his hatred of marriage as the Mormon fanatic is in favor of polygamy. It is surely not unreasonable to suppose that a Mormon may be a man of pure mind, of upright conduct, even of pious spirit, in spite of his eccentricity of having more wives than other people. Indeed, it is a common statement that in Salt Lake

City ordinary profligacy is unknown. Precisely in the same way Shelley, while holding odious opinions which in the estimation of most civilized people would sap, if carried out, the very foundations of society, was himself a man who impressed others by the almost virginal purity of his character. People who were horrified by his writings could scarcely believe they saw the man whose name was a portent, in the fair and gentle youth, of almost girlish aspect, whose ordinary speech was set to a higher music than other men's, and whose ordinary life was unsullied by a single blot of common profligacy. As we have already said, he was not a profligate, and it is almost too much to call him a sensualist. It would be truer to describe him as morally insane upon certain subjects, the chief of which was the marriage relation. This was the maggot in his brain. Governed solely by impulse, and reasoning entirely through the imagination, he allowed himself first to invent pernicious and unwholesome theories, and then with the common fearlessness of mania proceeded to put them into practice. Byron simply took the old road of vice, but went further along that way to everlasting burn-

ing than most other men have dared. Like most vicious men, he felt a morbid pride in boasting of his base exploits, and his vanity enjoyed the reputation of abnormal wickedness, which he had done his best to justify. There is no difficulty in classifying Byron; he was a brilliant rake. But Shelley was an entirely new species, and his place is not yet settled. He held vile views and yet impressed men with a child-like purity. He cursed his father, deceived his friend, and deserted his wife; yet every literary critic for sixty years has hesitated to call him a bad man. His poetry is full of a more subtle and perilous poison even than Byron's; yet its latest editor has declared Shelley one who possessed the qualifications necessary for a saviour of the world.

Was Shelley mad? It seems an insult to suggest such a question, and yet it is not so wholly foolish to do so as may appear. Of course, it would be a monstrous absurdity to suppose Shelley mad in the ordinary signification of the term. The man whose career was one brilliant and orderly development of genius, whose works grew in splendor and

magnificence, advancing with sure and steady power, to the very last, was not a man of broken or deranged intellect. But, nevertheless, a mind may possess the highest qualities and yet miss something of that perfect equipoise which we call sanity. Christopher Smart was mad, and his stately "Hymn to David" was actually composed while he was an inmate of an asylum. His madness was local, so to speak, and left his genius free. He was insane upon certain questions of conduct, but perfectly clear-headed on all other points. The case is perfectly common, and Shelley does seem, in some points, to approximate to it. He was mild and gentle until certain subjects were mentioned; then the hectic flush, which Hazlitt noted, appeared, and he shrieked and gesticulated like a dervish. He approached the most hideous suggestions of moral evil with a smiling nonchalance, and seemed absolutely unconscions that any shame could possibly attach to them. He had no sense of sin. The most vicious man shrinks from contemplating certain forms of vice, which to him had no taint of vice about them; he was as far above such a man in his conduct

as he was below him in his ideas. His wickedness was philosophic wickedness. A man who was temperate, self-denying, and chaste in his daily life, in his philosophy of conduct he uttered and propagated ideas which visit the bulk of men, if at all, as the passing horror of delirium or madness. He had the madman's fear of being thought mad. One of his constant illusions was that his father was seeking to trap him into an asylum, and he declared that attempts had been made to seize his person. Indeed, the whole history of these illusions—and there were many of them—lends strong color to the proposition that Shelley was not a perfectly sane man. A man who circumstantially describes how his wife has been wronged, how he has been shot at, how the officers of an asylum have entered his own house with orders to carry him off, when there is absolute evidence that nothing of the kind ever occurred, and could not have occurred, would certainly lie under the natural suspicion of unsound intellect in most societies. That he also wrote "Laon and Cyntha" would not dispel such a suspicion; indeed, the very manner in which he advocates, with the most brilliant

and alluring genius, immoralities which are not so much as named among decent men, apparently without the faintest idea that he is doing any thing criminal or unusual, would only serve to strengthen the belief.

The question of art and morals is a very vexed one, and naturally suggests itself in relation to Shelley. One reader, having followed me so far, will cry out that a man who glorified incest ought to be drummed out of the regiment of genius, for no splendor of eloquence or passion of poetry can afford proper apology for the infamy of his thought. But another will inevitably reply that Milton advocated polygamy; and if you are to make men of genius show a clean bill of moral health, or sign a self-denying ordinance in regard to aberrations of opinion before you admit them to the temple of fame, in truth your said temple will remain a very solitary place. You will have to reckon with the coarseness of Shakespeare, and the bestiality of Swift; you must convict Coleridge of criminal selfishness; Lamb's humor occasionally has a distinct alcoholic flavor; and poor Burns smells so strongly of whisky, and bears such obvious

traces of the ravages of passion, that no respectable custodian would dream of admitting him, or even of allowing him to rest within the porch without remonstrance, or possibly pious vituperation. That is how it ought to be, and no doubt would be, if Respectability had her way, and could always rely upon the faithfulness of the custodians she might nominate. She would have burned "Hamlet" together with "Lucrece," with much the same indiscriminating horror as that of the pious executor of Wesley, who discovered a much annotated Shakespeare among the testator's papers, and hastened to hide from the world the evidence of such unparalleled backsliding by consigning his master's manuscripts to the flames. In fact, we should have had a pretty regular series of bonfires of the vanities, on a much more extensive scale than the comparatively humble conflagrations with which Savonarola startled Florence in the fifteenth century. But fortunately, as one might show even on the ground of morals itself, Respectability does not exercise the despotism in literature which she does in drawing-rooms. She gives her orders with unmistakable precision enough,

and doubtless her custodians do their best to obey them. They make an immense bluster, as Jeffrey did about Wordsworth, and announce in stentorian tones that "This wont do." The Austrian general severely criticised Bonaparte for his intolerable audacity in breaking every rule of warfare, by fighting battles in the winter. By every rule of the game the young man was clearly wrong, yet somehow or other he contrived to win it. It is so that genius usually contrives to answer its assailants. The door-keepers of literature have the very best intentions, immaculate orthodoxy, alert dogmatism, unlimited pugnacity, profound belief in their mission, and yet even they hear the voice of the charmer, charming never so sweetly, and are beguiled. The music of the advancing lyre floats like invisible enchantment on their senses; its divine cadences might well make the trees rustle passionate response, or follow in obedient choirs; the warders try to lift their hands to the unswung bolts, but cannot, for the spell is on them; they try to frame the words of ban and doom, but are impotent, for a magical surprise holds their lips dumb, disparted; and then, without further

parley, from the greenwood bursts the young poet, with eyes aflame and face suffused in rapture, and lightly, as though into a sleeping palace, he leaps the golden threshold, and is seated with his peers in immortal life and reverence. From that secure throne he cannot be dragged down; and though the warders still may suffer much uneasy scruple, yet even they are fascinated, and obliterate the memory of defeat by singing pæans to the victor.

No doubt this perpetual controversy on art and literature is useful to the printer, but it is hard to find any other class of persons who are benefited by it. It is as futile as the endeavor to build houses from the top, and as impossible of demonstration as the squaring of the circle. The plain case appears to amount to this: that men will take their sides on such a question according to the degree in which the æsthetic or the moral sense is developed within them. Like Pilate and Herod, the two may become friends on the day when the human center of their controversy has given up the ghost; but the truce will last no longer than the thick darkness which covers the earth on the day of irreparable loss and mourning. The

disputants are irreconcilable, because they view their subject from diametrically different stand-points. Carlyle would have called Shelley "a puir creature;" and we have all had an opportunity of learning with what sickening revulsion and contempt he read the *Life of Keats* on its first appearance. Had Carlyle, then, no sense of beauty? Few men had a finer. A great portion of his writing, and that the noblest portion, is poetry in every thing but the form. Not even Wordsworth showed a tenderer love of Nature, nor Chaucer a finer fidelity in depicting her, than Carlyle has manifested in hundreds of rough jottings, sketches at first hand, which are found in his diaries and letters. But such passages spring rather from an unparalleled power of minute observation than from a keen æsthetic sense. The dominant stratum of Carlyle's character was morality, hard Scotch granite, out of which the sweetest waters could break, and on whose top soil the tenderest seedlings could thrive—humor, pathos, poetry, the most subduing gentleness, all were there; but the main formation of his mind was all the same vehement sternness, with more than a touch of the Pharisaism that

metes and judges, and swears by the law rather than the Gospel. He had little love of music, no love of art, and considerable contempt for any poetry but the poetry of action. To him it was inconceivable that any human creature should claim any dignity or reverence as a minister of the beautiful. Man did not live to write beautifully—Goldsmith, according to Johnson, could have done that about a broomstick—but to act beautifully. When, therefore, you united in one life the art of beautiful writing with the habit of infamous conduct, you presented to Carlyle a monstrosity upon which all his bitter ire flamed forth, and for which his one remedy was instant annihilation. The man of stern moral sense will always side with Carlyle, and will think in his heart—some might add, “with the fool”—that it were better Byron and Shelley had never been born. The man whose æsthetic sense is strong, and whose moral sense is weak; to whom poetry is an exhilaration, and music a passion; who can find the most exquisite of joys in a perfect phrase, and thoughts too deep for tears in the humblest flower that blows—will always be ready to pardon any thing to the man who

has baptized him into such delight and wrought in him such silent rapture. And between these two parties, who have a creed and believe in it, there will always troop certain disconsolate fugitives, who make the old futile attempt to serve two masters, and perpetually relieve their troubled consciences by casuistical papers in the reviews on the relations of morality and art.

Much has been written about the intangibility of Shelley's poetry, but in truth it is no more intangible than the man. I pause at this point to consider what is written, and may make free confession of certain uncomfortable qualms. One looks toward that quiet ghost which rises from the blue waters of Spezzia, or glides like a sunbeam through the pine forests of Pisa, or beside the glittering Serchio, and cries with Marcellus,

“'Tis gone !

We do it wrong, being so majestic,
To offer it the show of violence.”

One might almost add the other lines,

“ For it is, as the air, invulnerable,
And our vain blows malicious mockery.”

Browning asks, “ And did you once see Shelley

plain?" as though he too felt that Shelley was an ethereal presence, a wandering voice, an Ariel whose life was song, a most complex and almost intangible personality. Other poets have used the pathetic fallacy, and made Nature weep with their grief, and transmute their joy into bright sunlight and fragrant winds; but Shelley seems to have sunk himself in Nature, and made himself the translator of Nature's mute emotions. To use one of his own favorite phrases, his being became "inwoven" with the very life of the universe. We find it hard to realize him as a bodily presence; he is "as the air, invulnerable." He did not live prose and write poetry; he was poet from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot; a creature of imagination all compact. Speaking after the manner of men, we may doubt his sanity; but we are conscious, not the less, that our diagnosis has not gone to the heart of the case and plucked its mystery out. It is this remoteness, this insubstantiality of Shelley, which makes it so difficult to understand him. We never seem to be at home with him; just when we have got our finger on his pulse, and he stoops to whisper

his secret to us, a luminous mist falls between us and him, and we see him fade into air, thin air. Sometimes he seems to us a creature of demonic origin, but oftener an eternal child. Has any biographer, Mr. Jeaffreson included, given us the real Shelley yet? To give the real Byron was a very different matter. There a biographer was treading on firm ground, and dealing with flesh and blood; for that matter, with somewhat offensive flesh and blood. But Shelley eludes all human touch. When all the records are gathered into one, when Medwin has blundered, and Hogg has blabbed, and Mr. Jeaffreson disillusionized us; when we have honored his enthusiasm, and pitied his errors, and wondered at his moral obtuseness, and written all sorts of smart and malicious and tender things about him, we somehow feel like the old squire with the French wine, that we have got "no forrader." The voice sings on, in sweet passion and thrilling pathos; it loosens its silver notes and floods us with delight; it is hidden in the clouds, or uttered by the skylark, or lingers in the west wind and the sea; and it sings on as if in supreme contempt for us and our poor judgments, the

malicious mockery of our pointless repartee, and stupid cleverness of our mean sarcasms, even as a lark pouring out his soul against the sapphire sky of noontide thinks nothing of the riot and wrong of man, but only of the brightness of the sky and sweetness of the music, and the joy and triumph of life. It is this lack of robust flesh and blood in Shelley which makes both himself and his poetry so difficult of comprehension to the common people. No man has so completely realized the divine fury of the poet, the half-inspired and half-frenzied utterances of the man who is caught up into the seventh heaven, whether in the body or out of the body we cannot tell, and has become the witness of things which it is not lawful for a man to utter. He perpetually produces the impression of visionary splendor beyond all speech ; he strains at the barriers of language till his voice rises in one long, languorous, melodious wail, a lament for impotence, a passionate invocation to the unattainable :

“ Woe is me !

The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
Into the height of love's rare universe,
Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.
I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire.”

We listen entranced, as men do to the nightingale, and hold our breath, as the deep mellow notes bubble forth, and quicken in passion, and rise in steady flight, higher and yet higher, clearer and yet clearer, till we can well believe, when they cease suddenly at the utmost zenith of rapture, it is because the very throat has burst, and the very heart broken in excess of over-mastering ecstasy. Who has read "Epipsy-chidion" without at least some faint realization of what this means? Even Mr. Jeaffreson calls it the finest love-poem in the universe, and he is right. But it is no earthly love; it is spiritual passion, the rapture of a soul broken free of the flesh, but yet using the symbols of fleshly love, "confused in passion's golden purity." We pause and think, "He can soar no higher; mortal speech has done its utmost." We are faint and flushed with the difficult air, and can scarcely breathe. But Shelley is invigorated, and again begins, and soars yet higher, and sings in yet more piercing sweetness, till at last the sense seems to swoon, and the solid world slides from beneath our feet, and we, like the singer, sink and tremble and expire. When we wake it is like waking from delirium. We

have been utterly bewitched in a dream of sensuous beauty, and we rub our eyes to make sure the common earth is still our home. The spell of Shelley has been upon us, and there is no other poet capable of such inimitable magic. But there are few natures that can bear the spell, even as it was a unique nature which produced it, simply because there are many natures capable of pleasure but few of rapture, of pain, but not of agony, for whom indeed, by the necessary limitations of their own character, such words are too divine and deep, and savor more of frenzy than of truth.

To men of an imaginative mind and hard morality Shelley will always appear a mere blasphemous presence. They will never pierce the mist of intangibility and touch the real man. They will find it a congenial task to catalogue his errors and explain the sequence of his sins. What they will not be able to do will be to understand that nature sometimes produces characters of strange complexity, which fall into no category, and touch many classes but belong to none. It is not possible to draw any fixed line between the sheep and the goats at our earthly judgment-seats, or to separate the

wheat from the tares in human character. It is not possible to label and ticket men, as phrenologists do the sections of the skull, and say to precisely what class they shall be relegated. It is difficult even to discern where virtue grows warped and leans to vice, for the golden threads are closely bound up with the stained and blackened ones, and in destroying one you sometimes spoil the other. Criticism may be a very excellent employment in the world of letters, but it is an exceedingly futile one when it applies itself to character. Most futile of all employments is it when it approaches with its yard-measures and compasses a unique nature, and affects to take its true dimensions by rule of thumb, and explain its secret with the offensive glibness of a self-complacency which is "cock-sure of every thing."

But if to the bulk of men Shelley will never be a very real presence, or a very lovable one, there will always be those who will have enough imaginative insight to discern the real man, and they will love him with an unfailing devotion. There is no more pathetic figure in English literature. From first to last he is solitary and isolated. We see him as a boy, with

eager eyes and bright-flowing hair, alive with fancy, thrilling his sisters and frightening himself by the grotesque visions of an undisciplined imagination ; a frail wild slip of a child, needing more than common children a sympathetic atmosphere, and the kindest training. But such conditions were utterly denied him. He is the slave of impulse, and with no judgment to regulate that impulse. The benign influence of human goodness, not to say human piety, never fell upon him. The only sort of Christianity he was familiar with was the grotesque distortion embodied in a father whose chief articles of belief were the necessity of orthodoxy and the divine rights of property. The only elderly man who exercised any real influence over his intellectual growth was Dr. Lind, of Eton, and he was an atheist. It is needless to follow the well-remembered details of his expulsion from Oxford, his quarrels with his father, his poverty, his abstinence, his generosity, his misfortunes. It is not wonderful if the original morbid taint in his mind fed upon such food as this, and in his almost frantic love for liberty he advocated license. Life must often have seemed a very sorry business

to him. He never had a public for his writings ; scarcely one of his poems had a sale, and as he himself says, he wrote for himself and not for the public. Yet it cannot be doubted he desired a public, and keenly felt the contrast between his own literary failures and Byron's immense success. He tells us in lines of bitter sweetness :

“ Alas ! I have nor hope, nor health,
Nor peace within, nor calm around,
Nor that content surpassing wealth
The sage in meditation found,
And walked with inward glory crowned—
Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure.
Others I see whom these surround :
Smiling they live and call life pleasure ;
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure.”

Not in that hour of dejection only when he looked in utter sadness on the bright sea and purple noon of Naples, but many times did he feel that he could lie down,

“ Like a tired child,
And weep away the life of care.”

He could not solve the mystery of life—its shame, its wrong, its anguish ; and like many another pure and ardent spirit bruised himself in many a wild fluttering against the iron

bars of insolvable problems. And then he flew to Nature. In her freshness and grandeur, in the hospitality of her silence, and the friendliness of her unchangingness, he took refuge, and hid himself in her starry pavilion against the windy tempest of life's futility and malice. He becomes her high-priest and confidant. He serves her with unquenchable devotion and delight. He thirsts for her beauty, and toils to mirror her glory in fit and perfect speech. At thirty he is gray-headed, and his face is lined and furrowed like an old man's. The spirit of sorrow never leaves him ; his verse is one long lament, and underneath its utmost triumph the voice sobs quietly and the sick heart aches. Then suddenly the end comes, and Nature weaves her blackest tempest for a pall and opens the door of rest in the dim green depths of that unresting ocean he had loved so well. He dies with purpose, character, and work alike unfinished. We know what he did, but know not what he might have done or been. But life is only just begun at thirty, and ended thus in its beginning, surely merits the grace of charity, of sympathy, of pity. That meed of reverent

feeling has never yet been denied by any who have drunk of the magic stream of his poetry, and never will be wanting so long as English literature endures, and with it the name of Shelley.

WORDSWORTH AND HIS MESSAGE.

IN the ordinary development of personal culture there are certain usual and well-defined stages. There are voices in literature which appeal especially to youth and rouse its strenuous impulses, and there are voices that do not effectually pierce the soul until the advent of sedater years and the more constant mind. It is seldom that the literary friends of youth are the friends of age, and rare and memorable is that book which casts its glamour over boyhood and has lost no portion of its wizardry in the duller period of fading years. There are few books which have this universal charm, and they are the greatest. They may almost be numbered upon one's fingers, and the names they bear are the peerage of literature.

In that august company Wordsworth cannot be enrolled, for the spell of Wordsworth, exquisite as it is, is limited and very far from commonly felt. Scott is the poet of boyhood, Byron the poet of youth, Shelley the inspira-

tion of early manhood, while to the young heart Keats is the very minister of sensuous beauty, the thrilling voice that sings from the lattices of

“ Magic casements opening on the foam,
Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn.”

There is a time when the healthy chivalry of Scott sets the boy's heart thrilling, just as later the splendid bitterness of Byron quickens it to revolt, or shadows it with morbid sorrow. Shelley carries that revolt, as it were, into a farther world, and fills the firmament with the same war and passion that Byron breeds upon the earth. It is the revolutionary note in Shelley that secures him the ear of youth, and according to the strength of the poetic fiber in a youth will he choose either Byron or Shelley as his singer. The shallower nature, or we might say the grosser nature, will fall a prey to Byron; the more spiritual nature will kindle with the ethereal fury and rebellion of Shelley. But both, in their measure, will remain overmastering influences upon the heart of youth. Against these Wordsworth has no chance. There is no fury in his verse. He has no cynicism, no quips and pranks of bitter humor or

bitterer blasphemy. He brings with him no whirlwind, but a fresh and quiet air; he rises on us with no tumult of tempestuous clouds, but with the ineffable serenity and strength of that "sacred dawn" he loved so well to picture. He has no brilliance wherewith to dazzle us; no mystery to fascinate our curiosity, no silent anguish on his shut lips to move our sympathy. He is not dramatic; a more undramatic man never lived. His voice is like the voice of a ballad-singer following a fantasia; so simple that we fancy we may scorn it, yet so sweet and clear that we begin to listen even in spite of ourselves. The waves of endless storms break in futile wrath upon the iceberg, but the warm Gulf-stream comes at last and dissolves what they could not shatter, and subdues that which it could never carry by assault. The influence of Wordsworth upon his time has been the influence of the Gulf-stream; it has flowed silently and surely, and has conquered. It is for reasons like these that Wordsworth can afford to wait his time. He had to do so while he lived in relation to his fame; he has to do so still in relation to his acceptance by individuals. He wrote for nearly fifty years

amid all but universal scorn, and yet suffered no diminution of strength or hope, and overcame at last. He will sing in vain still to the heart of youth full of its first fire and fervor. He will seem to be a singer of no account, an aged bard who stands in the market-place and pipes to those who will not dance. But inevitably there comes a time in the history of any true personal culture when this quiet bard draws us to himself, and grapples us with hooks of steel. He becomes what no other has become to us—the friend of our solitude, the inspiration of our duty, the consoler of our disillusion; keeping full pace with us to whatsoever heights of thought or deed we may aspire, and remaining to the end a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

It is not to any detailed criticism of the works of Wordsworth I would now address myself; the libraries already groan with reams of disquisition on that subject. Never has poor mortal been so utterly routed and flouted as Francis Jeffrey for that famous *obiter dictum* of his, that Wordsworth “wouldn’t do.” Among all the unhappy ghosts of hades none can be much more perennially uncomfortable

than he. Every fresh cargo of critics ferried over by Charon for the last fifty years have brought news of the world-wide fame of the man who "wouldn't do;" and without doubt, if they have not forgotten their old urbanity, they have sought poor Francis out instantly and given him a piece of their minds. Flaying a poet must be quite a mild and humane sport to this posthumous persecution of a king of critics, as Francis has perhaps discovered to his cost. The only question I have to ask about the poetry of Wordsworth is, What is the nature of his message to our age? The simpler and more interesting question is, What was the nature of the man himself?

First of all, as regards the man, it may be said that no one who has written fascinating poetry has ever had less of the secret of fascination in himself. He was destitute of wit, and his attempts at humor in "Peter Bell" are very like the performances of that celebrated German baron who thought humor was best attained by jumping on the table. He struck most people as a remarkably prosaic man. The brilliant conversationalists of his day found him dull, and the Westmoreland peasantry, among whom he

lived, said he was not "lovable in his face, by no means," and judged from his habitual reticence that he was "a desolate-minded man." One is tempted to say he lacks individuality, though that would not be true, as we shall see; but certainly he lacked those dazzling qualities which have made most great men memorable. There are no enigmas in his character; he was a simple, just, and temperate man, with no electric flash of wayward passion, no black depth of cynical melancholy in his nature. In this he is the very opposite of such a poet as Byron. It is difficult even now to say whether it is Byron the man or Byron the poet who exercises the strongest spell over us. He endears himself by his frailties and fascinates with his suffering. We think, for instance, of such a story as that of Lady Caroline Lamb meeting by accident the hearse that was turning northward with the body of Byron, and on learning whose it was going home with a shattered brain, to die; and we feel, in spite of all juster knowledge, that there must have been something deep, something wonderful and fine, in this man's nature that women should have loved him with such pas-

sionate love. The incident is intensely dramatic, as a hundred incidents in the life of Byron are, and we are thrilled. That life of Byron, with its strange speed and splendor, its swift alternations of brightness and blackness, its bitterness and baseness and tragic ruin, will always fascinate mankind. It is a play that will never tire of studying; it thrills them. Thus it will happen in the future, as it has already happened in the past, that the individuality of Byron will preserve his poetry from decay; the man is more than the poetry. In the case of Wordsworth the converse is nearer the truth; the poetry is greater than the man.

This, upon the whole, is the general impression Wordsworth creates, and we simply make note of it as an impression. It finds further and amusing corroboration in the general ideas the Westmoreland peasantry entertained about him. They felt that, while his qualities were of the sterling and durable type, yet there was a total absence of geniality about him. He did not stop and talk to children; he took his family out with him for long walks, but usually went ahead and said nothing to them; he never laughed and seldom smiled; in fact, "a

desolate-minded man." "You might tell from his face his poetry would never have no laugh in it," said one of them. "As for his habits he had noan; niver knew him with a pot in his hand or a pipe in his mouth," said another. "He went a-bumming about—bum, bum, bum, and stop;" "He had a rare deep voice; children sometimes heard it rising in some solitary place and ran away scared"—are other reminiscences of his habits, or rather, according to the Westmoreland code of life, his lack of habits. It is curious to find how, in their rough and blundering phrases, these Westmoreland peasants precisely discerned the cardinal defect of Wordsworth's nature—this lack of geniality and fascination. Their ideal poet was poor Hartley Coleridge. He had very decided habits, and all of the wrong sort; one fears the greatest part of that sad wasted life of his was spent with a pipe in his mouth and a pot in his hand. But he had this strange secret of personal fascination: every body loved him. His neighbors had great difficulty in accepting the poetic claims of Wordsworth—"he was a well-meaning, quiet, dacent man," but they believed poor Hartley a very great poet

indeed. It was commonly supposed that Hartley's relation to Wordsworth was that of the unfortunate chief to his fortunate subordinate : he " did the best part of his poems for him," so the saying is. Opinion was slightly divided ; some thought Dorothy Wordsworth wrote her brother's poems for him, and some thought Hartley wrote them, but very few gave Wordsworth himself the credit of them. In their way these Westmoreland peasants confessed that their ideal of a poet was very much akin to the ideal set up by the morbid school of to-day ; the poet was a frail wild creature, passionate, fascinating, wayward, addicted to pots and pipes and other unholy indulgences—somebody to be pitied by the charitable, humored by the pitiful, and taken to the heart and loved forever by the sentimental. Their ideal of the poet was the Byronic ideal in fact, and that is, after all, the prevalent ideal in middle-class minds ; and Wordsworth, with his silence, his self-absorption, his love of solitude, his plain ways and undramatic history, is the very opposite to this creature of vicious and unwholesome sentiment.

No doubt the world is very mad and very

foolish, but undoubtedly it sets high store upon this charm of personality of which Wordsworth was so singularly destitute. It rates it above steadfastness and honor, unsullied probity, untarnished morals. As a weapon to win fame with it has always proved supreme. Some of the worst of men have been the idols of the people by simple virtue of their power of fascination. Probably no two men ever lived with harder, narrower, more intensely selfish natures than Bonaparte or Charles II., but see how they fascinated men ! The old gray cloak and cocked hat of Bonaparte were followed by the adoration of millions ; their appearance before a hostile city was sufficient to make every soldier drop his arms and cry, " Vive Napoleon ! " and before their magical approach a throne tottered and a kingdom relented. Charles II. was as shallow and graceless a scamp as ever sullied the name of prince, but men poured gold into his lap when he smiled, and forgot the Dutch fires blazing at Sheerness when he jested. The very gigantic nature of the wickedness of such men has been a source of fame, an element of success ; for men admire great sinners almost as much as they do

great saints. It is vain to appeal to the Byron-Lytton school on behalf of Wordsworth. Against these giaours and corsairs, these gentlemen whose melancholy is permanent and attractive, who reduce seduction to a science and elevate despair into a fine art, these Cagliostros of poetry, who are most brilliant when most wicked and increasingly famous as they are increasingly depraved, William Wordsworth has no chance. Men like to be dazzled, and Wordsworth holds no such 'spell'; he is not histrionic, he is not melancholy, he is not wicked; and the public which desires such qualities in a poet will always hold the "quiet, dacent man" of Rydal Mount in vast contempt.

It might very well be shown that this Byronic ideal of the poet is not merely false, but is new. It was a fashion that came in with the Revolution, for nothing was more shaken in that wild whirl of tumult than the moral convictions of men. One can find no trace of this diseased sentimentalism in the four greatest of all poets—Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton. The peculiar virtue of Wordsworth is that amid all that breaking up of laws and customs he kept his sobriety, his serenity, and

his faith. He fell back upon the essential facts of the universe, and felt that, though all kingdoms were shaken, there was a kingdom that must remain. His theory of poetry was the conscious or unconscious outcome of that calm conviction. What was that theory? Put in its briefest form it amounted to this: that it was time for poets to return to nature, to natural and simple themes, and to clothe such themes in the plain language of the common people. It asserted the dignity of common life and the sacredness of the natural affections. It was a protest against the diseased sentiment, the histrionic melancholy, the faithless cynicism which had corrupted the life of English poetry, not less than a protest against the meretricious glitter of the style in which such poetry had been couched. His poetry was meant to be a rebuke against a debased poetic style, and his character and career were yet a finer rebuke against a debased poetic life.

Added to this, Wordsworth claimed for poetry a religious mission, and invested it with the sanctity of a divine calling. The long critical warfare waged against the Lakers was not fought out upon the comparatively triv-

ial issue of pure or ornate style; it touched far deeper and more essential questions. The poet was in his eyes a high-priest, and his art was a ministration. This was not a new idea in poetry; it had already been asserted in the splendid and energetic eloquence of Milton. It is curious to notice that not even in Shakespeare, and still less in Homer, is there any trace of this idea. In what are probably the last lines Shakespeare ever wrote—the epilogue to the “*Tempest*”—when, like Prospero’s, his charms were “all o’erthrown,” he especially defines his conception of his work, when he says his art is to enchant, his project is to please; though he does indeed strike a note of more solemn and pathetic significance when he adds:

“And my ending is despair,
Unless I be relieved by prayer.”

But apart from this mere hint at the diviner height and aspect of his art he gives no sign. In Milton alone, among the peers of earlier English poetry, does this conception of the poet’s art find its full expression. But with Milton the idea has a rigidity and limitation which are not found in Wordsworth. In Milton

it exhales the flavor of the noblest Puritanism ; in Wordsworth it is of wider application, and includes the noble paganism of lofty nature-worship. The poet with him is again a seer, an interpreter, a speaker of the deep things of God ; but he is more : he is a natural man, whose days are bound together by natural piety, and whose spirit is lost in deep communion with the spirit of the living universe. He serves before the everlasting altars of the high mountains, and has passed into the holiest place of the mystery of universal life. His whole attitude is priestly ; the world is a living temple roofed with splendor, and he has in his gift absolution and peace for the souls of erring men. He is no mere ephemeral person ; he is in the great apostolic succession of truth, and his diocese is as wide as the walls of heaven.

Let any one weigh such lofty claims as these against the sensational cynicism of Byron, or the light tintinnabulation of Mr. Thomas Moore, and the uniqueness of Wordsworth's position in the dawn of the nineteenth century will be at once apparent. While all the poets of his day were ransacking earth and heaven for some new form of sensationalism, and were

busy blowing bubbles of brilliant froth in the heated chambers of society, he had taken refuge in the serenity and strength of nature, and had found thoughts too deep for tears in the humblest flowers that blew. While they were swept along the wild mill-race of revolution, or whirled in the worse vortex of personal or social debasement, he had stepped aside into the clear light and solemn solitude of the everlasting hills, and heard the broken thunder of the mad world only like a distant undertone, too distant to be terrible, but near enough to bear witness to the tragic heart of life—"the still sad music of humanity." While their ideal of a poet was a miserable and misanthropic being, whose book was written within and without with mourning and lamentation and woe, Wordsworth had formulated his idea of a poet thus—and the sketch is obviously a portrait :

"But who is this with modest looks
And clad in sober russet gown?
He murmurs by the running brooks
A music sweeter than their own ;
He is retired as noontide dew
Or fountain in a noontide grove."

What an apparition is that for the curled

darlings of the Byronic school to gaze upon! It is Chaucer, shorn of his humor and turned philosopher; it is Thomas à Kempis, worshipping Nature and changed to poet! What wonder that grave face and russet gown became merely a target for ridicule amid the profligate glitter of the regency? What marvel that a world which was going mad over the conjugal infelicities of Byron had scant attention for a man who brought them the crystal water of simple joys rather than the delirious cup of passion, and sung of running brooks rather than the diseased secrets of an unhappy life? We do not ask nowadays which is the truer ideal of the true poet. The world has left Byron and come round to Wordsworth. It is enough to remember that the final achievement of the one is "Don Juan;" of the other, "The Excursion."

Lovers of sensationalism will of course turn from Wordsworth to the end of the story; but that is simply evidence of their own shame and his glory. The select souls are given to the singer with the russet gown. It must be owned that the poet finds what he brings: the sheep know his voice, and the voice of a

stranger do they not know. Wordsworth knew this truth, and thus it was he had so large a faith in time and so sublime a confidence in himself. To every man of genius the veiled angel of destiny makes offer of two caskets and bids him choose. The one glitters with jewels and is ablaze with gold, but it is empty. The other is plain and undecorated, but it endures when jewels are scattered and gold lost in the miry roads along which the weary armies of mankind march, and it is full of the suffrages of posterity. The first casket is the prize of immediate notoriety; the second is the pledge of enduring fame. Many there are who choose the first, and few are they who trust their deeper instincts and choose the second. Of those few we know now, though sixty years ago none suspected it, that William Wordsworth was one; and this was the victory that overcame the world, even his faith.

We have noted some of the sterner features of Wordsworth's nature which rendered him unattractive—his self-absorption, his reticence, his lack of geniality—but it is quite possible to construct, from the broken hints that have

come down to us, a picture of the real Wordsworth which is as beautiful as it is true. What a tender picture that is, for instance, which one of the old female servants of Rydal Mount draws of him humming the lines of a poem, while "Miss Dorothy kept close behind him, and she picked up the bits as he let 'em fall, and took 'em down, and put 'em together on paper for him." Dorothy Wordsworth is one of the most memorable figures in literary history, and deserves more than passing mention. It was she who met her brother when he returned from France, with broken hopes, after the terror of the Revolution, and led him back to Nature, and taught him to attain that calm insight which is the bliss of solitude. Her greatness, and it is the divinest greatness, lay, like Mrs. Carlyle's, in her self-renunciation; she was content to minister to her brother's genius and to find her chief joy in the growth of his mind. The love of the lake district was hers before it was his, and it was she who transmitted and fostered the passion in him. How many a touch of felicitous energy or tender truth she added to his poems we have no means of knowing; but we cannot help sus-

pecting that it was she, and not Mrs. Wordsworth, who added those two most exquisite lines to the poem of the Daffodils:

“They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.”

Never had poet more fit companion for his lonely walks than Wordsworth had in this woman, who knew what sociality there is in silence, and never broke it with vain words, and knew even better what suggestiveness there is in heartfelt speech, and never spoke save to gather up in memorable phrase the rare and fleeting sensations of visionary beauty. The two most memorable literary companionships of the first half of this century were those between Charles and Mary Lamb and William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The ineffable pathos of the one is as lovely as the calm and simple sentiment of the other. If there is yet a great artist left among us who desires two national themes for two immortal pictures here are the subjects to his hand. For the first picture let him seize that moment when Charles and Mary Lamb cross the last meadow on the way to the asylum; the pale, stooping scholar hand-in-hand with the strange,

dark-eyed girl—both weeping, both weighed down with an intolerable secret, both pilgrims on the Via Dolorosa of infinite sacrifice and sorrow, each clinging to the other with despairing love and the anguish of foreboding fear. For the second let him paint the tall figure of Wordsworth, with the “round blue cloak and big wide-awake, poorly dressed at the best of times,” followed closely, at the distance of half a pace or so, by Dorothy Wordsworth, with her eager face and clear eyes—busy noting in her book the last stanza of such a poem as “She dwelt beside the banks of Dove,” while round both rise the mountains, checkered by the April drift of light and shade, and in the near distance lies the tarn of Further Gowbarrow, beneath the shadow of whose shore there gleam that

“Host of golden daffodils
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.”

In one picture there would live the tragic anguish of life; in the other, its solemn ecstasy. In both there would be represented immortal love.

Quite as fine in their way are other pictures

that might be drawn of the real Wordsworth. Every one will remember his description of the love of skating, and how, hissing along the polished ice,

“ Not seldom from the uproar he retired
 Into a silent bay, or sportively
 Glanced sideways, leaving the tumultuous throng,
 To cut across the reflex of a star.”

What a fine picture that would make! The clear black ice of one of the lonelier mountain tarns, the winter sparkle of the stars, the solemn peaks buttressing the blue and windless vault of heaven, the distant cry of some solitary night-bird, and the long vibrating ring of the lonely skater—for sounds can be hinted at in a great picture and interpreted by the subtle process of true art to the imagination—and that lonely skater, flying like a winged shadow hither and thither, the poet who has made those solitudes his home, and has dedicated his life to the interpretation of their mystery. The only word that strikes like false art in the description is that word “sportively.” We are quite sure in such a scene Wordsworth would be touched to solemnity rather than sportiveness. In such a moment a mind like

his would have kindled not so much with the exhilaration of the sport as with the weird beauty of the scene. His thought would be of the swift rush and mystery of life, the immensities that lie beneath it and above it, life itself seeming but "a troubled moment in the being of the everlasting silence." Given starlit midnight, and a belt of darkened mountains, and we have the two great natural agencies best able to produce solemn and searching thoughts in the heart of man. It is a scene in which the ode on "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Childhood" might have been conceived. It was a scene, as he himself has reminded us, in which he recognized "a grandeur in the beatings of the heart," and felt the power of that

"Wisdom, and spirit of the universe!
Thou soul, that art the eternity of thought!
And giv'st to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion!"

I think, of all the many pictures full of simple grace and beautiful serenity which crowd upon the memory from the writings of Wordsworth, there is none I would so readily choose as a fit and noble setting for a true

portrait of him who has taught us more than any other

“How exquisitely the individual mind to the external
world

Is fitted, and how exquisitely, too,

The external world is fitted to the mind.”

Certainly there has been not merely no more memorable figure in modern literature than William Wordsworth, but no more memorable figure in relation to modern life itself. Many men feel in the first enthusiasm of youth that they have a mission to fulfill, but few men have the courage and fidelity to pursue their mission. “The world is too much with them;” they are speedily seduced by its fascinations, and enslaved by the overmastering force of its conventionality. Wordsworth found his mission when he went to dwell among the lakes, and he was heroically faithful to it through evil and through good report. He turned aside from the race for honor and place, not with the spiteful cynicism of disappointment or the bitter passion of contempt, but in obedience to the mandate of a serious and simple spirit. Few things in literary history are more striking than the retirement of Carlyle to the desolate

isolation of Craigenputtock; but Carlyle's retirement was limited in time and imperfect in renunciation. In his heart he never ceased to covet the fuller and more passionate life of cities, and felt that Craigenputtock was a prison. It is, perhaps, all the more powerful testimony to the strength of his unique character that he bore so great and painful an imprisonment of gigantic energies for so long. But he never fully acquiesced in his severance from more social life. He never regarded it as final; he never thought of it otherwise than as a means to an end. When Wordsworth turned his face northward he broke the last bond that linked him to conventional life, and he did it willingly. He knew that he was going to live as a peasant among peasants, and he was content. He meant to dedicate his great powers to a task that might be hopeless, that must be prolonged, that could not be other than hard and sacrificial in most of its conditions; but he did it, and never regretted it. In later days prosperity dawned upon him; but very few have clearly understood what the world would call the "hardships" of those earlier days. If ever "high

thinking and plain living" found not merely an apostle, but an example, it was in him.

To the readers of to-day the old ideal of poetry in a garret has become an obsolete fiction. *Our* poets live in palaces; they are connoisseurs and patrons of art; they flit with the easy grace of wealth from country mansion to town-house; they no longer haunt the patron's gate. Do they not sit cheek by jowl with Dives? Have they not even been known to descend to the peerage? And do they not receive yearly checks that run into the dignity of four figures?

But Wordsworth was "a mean-living man," as the peasants say, living even more simply than they. "Never wore a boxer in his life," said another—always the round cloak and plain raiment of the peasant. When he rode abroad—we regret to mention so impolite a circumstance, but Mr. Rawnsley* says his neighbors all aver it—it was in a dung-cart, with a board across and a bit of clean bracken at the bottom. His library had no choice editions or delicate

* Mr. Rawnsley is the author of an excellent paper on the "Reminiscences of Wordsworth among the Peasantry," printed in the *Transactions of the Wordsworth Society*. I am much indebted to him, and hereby acknowledge my obligation.

bindings ; it was plain and scanty. In every feature of his life this austerity of habit is visible. He had set himself to teach how few are the real wants of man ; how deep and divine are those common joys of the affections which are within the reach of all ; how self-sufficing is simplicity ; how false and fevered is the life of man when it is withdrawn from the healing influences of nature and degraded into a wild scramble for the soiled gold or tinsel glory of ambition ; and that which he taught he practiced. " We know only what we practice," was his motto, as well as Savonarola's. The well-spring of his philosophy was in the order of his own life. That life thus became the finest sermon ever preached to this hurried age of ours, the finest and the most needful ; and its divine lesson was :

"What an empire we inherit,
As natural beings in the strength of nature."

When we justly consider these things I think we shall find a new William Wordsworth emerging from the shadows of the past, and surely not an unlovable Wordsworth. We shall forget his awkwardness and stiffness in those brilliant circles of society which he

visited now and again in the days of his late-dawning fame. We shall forgive him that his poetry has so little of passion in it, and upon the whole we shall be thankful for it. There are many other poets who can give us passion ; but who else can give us peace? To whom can we go so well in the hour when our hearts are grieved and our nerves worn down by the ceaseless harass of life amid a crowd? I do not say when our hearts are broken ; for then we ask for a teacher who has himself passed into the sanctuary of sorrow, and trodden the wine-press alone, and Wordsworth cannot claim to have done that. It may be true, as Matthew Arnold has exquisitely put it, that

“ Wordsworth’s eyes avert their ken
From half of human fate ;”

but that is only saying that Wordsworth has the defects of his qualities. But who else presents the same qualities and ministers to us the same “sweet calm?” And even in the hour of sorrow such serenity as his is sometimes even more welcome than the sympathy of others. It is, in fact, a nobler sort of sympathy—calm, godlike, healing. Not in vain, and not with sacrilegious arrogance, did he esteem

his art a ministration ; in the oldest and truest sense the minstrel and the minister are one, and such minstrelsy is his. He ministers to the mind diseased, and his medicine has the wholesome potency of nature. He brings the freshness of the mountain air in his presence, and his voice is like the lark's. We love him as we do that winged "pilgrim of eternity," and we can listen to him when all other songs distress our jaded sense. Who has not fled from his Babel, vexed, troubled, worn out, and in the blessed solitude of Nature felt his strength renewed while he stood amid the open fields and clothed himself with their silence as with a garment, and felt again the breath of blue sky over him and heard again the magic whisper of the leaves and brooks? Wordsworth has so perfectly absorbed that charm of Nature that his poetry does for us just what Nature herself does in such hours as these : he purges and refreshes us. If poetry is, as some one has beautifully described it, the Sabbath influence of literature, Wordsworth breathes upon us the very Sabbath of poetry—its rest, its devotion, and its healing calm.

Certain it is, no English poet has shown so

perfect a fidelity in his descriptions of Nature. He may claim to have set a new fashion in regard to her—the fashion of minute and exquisite observation. His life was essentially an out-door life, and that is the secret of the perennial freshness of his charm. Nothing escaped those vigilant eyes of his; and his sense of sound was as perfect as his power of vision. This wonderful precision finds an admirable example—the best that I can think of—in that terse and perfect picture which he gives of the desolate, windy height of a lonely mountain pass:

“The single sheep, and that one blasted tree,
And the bleak music of that old stone wall.”

He was, moreover, what the peasants called “a verra practical-eyed man.” He hated to see the slightest wrong inflicted on a landscape by the stupid folly of man. He used his authority to secure the right building of chimneys and in the prevention of the vulgar use of colors. When a copse was cleared the dalesman would leave a few trees standing that his eye might not be offended. He instituted himself by common consent guardian of that beautiful district which he had learned to

love so passionately, and he taught the dalesmen to take new pride and pleasure in its preservation. This also was part of his mission, and not an inglorious part; and for this, too, I love him. In those long walks of his he was guarding and securing one of the choicest heritages of the English people; and all who are still left among that people, who do not bow down and worship before the omnipotence of the railroad, and whose chief aim is not to spin a little faster than their neighbors in the wild dervish-whirl of vulgar ostentation, will thank God for William Wordsworth, and thank William Wordsworth for what he did.

The gift, then, that Wordsworth brings to us is serenity, and the message he delivers is simplicity. We do not go to him to be excited but to be strengthened. He, in his turn, does not pose before us in a dramatic attitude, as a suppliant for sentimental pity; he stands before us as a wise teacher, in whose lips are the words of everlasting life. Those who do not love him must revere him; but, for my part, I find it easy to do both. If poetry be something more than a pool of chaotic sentiment, that gives forth iridescent vapors, brill-

iant films and bubbles; if it be a healing stream, flowing clear as crystal from the throne of God and bordered by the trees of life; if it be an inspired voice, "a vision and a faculty divine," then in Wordsworth I recognize the noblest poet of our century. "This wont do!" O, Francis Jeffrey! had you but known it, this man spake the words that made for your peace and ours; he brought precisely what would do, the book bitter in the lips to critics like you, but sweet and healing to the soul of our vexed, tumultuous generation; the one medicine, the one message that we most imperatively needed. It is precisely such ministration as this that our age needs still; and our house of literature will be left to us desolate indeed when such sweet voices shall have died out of it. What he meant to do, and what he did, Wordsworth has severely defined for us in four memorable lines:

"The moving accident is not my trade,
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts;
'Tis my delight alone in summer shade
To pipe a simple song to thinking hearts."

"The moving accident"—no; for it was Wordsworth's creed that life is not determined

by its accidents but by its essence, and that its divinest possessions are its simplest and its widest characteristics and emotions. The freezing of the blood—no; for sensationalism is a base and easy trick—the trade of the necromancer, but not the function of the poet; it is his to make sunlight in a shady place; to call men back to their inalienable heritage of natural joys; to visit them with gifts of benediction and of peace; to teach them the secret of divine tranquillity in a life freed from haste and lifted high above the unholiness of avarice—

“ To pipe a simple song to thinking hearts.”

RELIGIOUS DOUBT AND MODERN
POETRY.

MATTHEW ARNOLD, BROWNING, TENNYSON.

MR. W. E. H. LECKY, in his learned *History of European Morals*, has commented, in a striking foot-note, upon the immense growth and influence of the newspaper press, and on the fact that it is chiefly directed by lawyers and barristers. Mr. Lecky's inference from the last-named circumstance is that a "judicial" tone is thus introduced into the daily press, and a "judicial" method of thought consequently imparted to the public mind. From this inference we totally disagree; for the lawyer-barrister mind is essentially forensic, not judicial; and one very general issue of newspaper press influence upon the public mind is political and social partisanship. A far more important result of the enormous growth of the press is the great impetus given to the taste for reading among

the classes to whom at one time literature of any kind was a sealed and sworded paradise, whose trees of good and evil were jealously guarded against the encroachments of the multitude and the curiosity of the vulgar. At the present moment it may almost be said that the flaming swords wherewith intolerant and exclusive legislation used to guard the garden have burned themselves out, and the great domain, with its crowded and accumulated growth, lies open, without toll or hinderance, to the poorest. Therein are to be found trees of knowledge as stately as Milton's, and founts of song as pure and deep as Wordsworth's; but the face of Villon leers in the shadows, and the pestilent obscenity of Congreve, Sterne, and Swift has left many a livid pool of poison on the verges of the greenest lawns and at the roots of the mightiest forest-growths of genius. In a word, such freedom brings its natural peril, and the wayfarer finds the serpent close beside the tree of knowledge still.

Not merely has the reading public increased, but, as a natural consequence, the writing public has also steadily grown.

“The mob of gentlemen who write with ease” was never so large as in the present day. There is a vast number of minds endowed with a mimetic gift which passes for a literary instinct, and education and opportunity conspire to kindle a literary ardor which finds its vent in books that benefit nobody but the trunk-maker, and between whose birth and oblivion there is but a step. The mass of so-called poetry which is published, and which actually commands attention and numbers its editions, is what Dominie Sampson might well call “prodigious.” Much of this successful verse is the product of fine and cultured minds who find in verse-making one of the many pleasant and most easily acquired arts of literature. Much of it succeeds by following the reigning fashion or by modeling its “silvery see-saw of sibilants” upon the method of the latest favorite; much more is simply the ludicrous contortion of ambitious mediocrity, and its whole vocation is endless and very indifferent imitation; and therefore it is a question of the highest importance, Who and what manner of models are the poets thus set up as examples? Voltaire’s barber hastened to assure

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his master that he did not believe in God any more than the gentleman did ; and it is certain, in poetry as in every thing else, that the master-mind finds itself mimicked and echoed in every particular by the inferior. If the master sing of Chloe and Phyllis, straightway the chorus will sing in hundred-fold laudation of Daphne and Sylvander ; if of blessed damosels and anguished lilies, the chorus multiplies its dirges of faded sunflowers and its raptures at the moving vision of blue china ; and if the master degrade his genius to chant the blasphemies of atheism and the swinish revels of carnality, the chorus will sing in yet grosser fashion the democratic upheaval and the apotheosis of the brute.

Moreover, it must be remembered that the chief ministry of poetry is a ministry of suggestion. The poet is the interpreter, but not the less the leader, of his age. His words may not become the street-song of the multitude or the solace of the poor man's hearth, but often a higher and more strenuous fate is theirs—they become the inspiration of the thinker. The influence of a great poet on the best minds of his generation is like the action

of the sunlight ; silently it gathers force and spreads itself abroad and marks the fullness of its power by the ripened bloom upon the fruit and the depth of tint and color in the flower. In like manner the highest prose-genius of a time often takes its color from the highest poetry of the period. Often the poet is content to leave his exposition in the hands of the few whom he can trust, knowing well that through the influence of those few his words will not fail of reaching the widest audience of his time.

Therefore, if it be said that the great bulk of the people do not read poetry, we can only retort that every writer for the press in this country does ; that the leaders of opinion on every great social and religious question do ; that the poet first molds the fervid mind of youth in our public schools, and overshadows our universities with his presence, and meets us in Protean fashion in every avenue of our common literature. Civilization has advanced, but as yet we have not seen any sign of the fulfillment of Macaulay's prophecy in the decline of poetry. At the crest of the far-rolling wave of civilization will always be found the

highest outcome of the poet's "vision and faculty divine." Civilization, so far from destroying poetry, has really done very much to intensify it ; but it has changed its methods. It has robbed poetry of the old freshness and simplicity of its utterance, the ancient force and directness of its form, and has surcharged it instead with the feverishness and satiety of a complex modern life, full of many aims, throbbing with the pulse of large and eager purpose, and saddened by the vain pursuit of a perfect culture, which more and more proves itself an unattainable and mocking dream. So long as the human heart remains poetry will not die nor the poet's mandate be withdrawn. Man never yet has lived alone upon the bread which the wealthiest civilizations have kneaded for his use ; nor will any "ethics of the dust," any applications of a marvelous science that merely multiplies the conveniences of social life, or claims his curious wonder at the price of the denial of his religious instincts, suffice him now any better than heretofore. Pascal long since reminded us of the undying truth that "the heart has reasons which reason does not know," and poetry may be described as

the reason of the heart. And it is because we feel that our higher culture will rather indorse and widen the poet's mandate than abridge it that we think there can be no more serious problem presented to the investigation of the thinker, in the interests of the society of the future, than the problem which seeks to measure and define the influence of our modern poetry.

Let it be granted, then, that a distinct new note, or rather series of new notes, has been struck in the poetry of the last fifty years, the distinctive characteristic of which is the problem of religious faith.

The supreme question of the present day is the attitude of the age toward religion, and that question finds a hundred reflexes and vain solutions in our poetic art. Of course, it may be said the century opened with the fierce strife of religious doubt and denial in the poetry of Byron and Shelley, and that, therefore, this is no distinctly new feature of our latter-day poets. But there are many respects in which Byron and Shelley differ wholly in their attitude toward religion from their lineal descendants in poetic art. It was said of

Byron by Shelley that unfortunately he could not help believing in a hell ; and this statement admirably illustrates his habitual conduct in dealing with matters of faith and piety. His libertinism was ingrained, his infidelity was an affectation. When he is throwing his wildest doubts into the air he never loses self-consciousness ; he has his eye upon the gallery, and waits for its applause. He is so ill an actor that whenever he strikes an attitude he pauses to measure its effect. Whatever he says against his beliefs he cannot help believing ; and one cannot help feeling that he writes profanity in much the same spirit in which he talked of his desire to know the sensations of a murderer merely that he might enjoy the childish pleasure of watching the horror he was certain to excite. Shelley's atheism, on the contrary, is undoubtedly sincere. But it is rather the frenzied scream of an excited boy than the iconoclastic fury of a full-grown man. It is not merely rebellion against orthodox faiths, it is wild and unmeasured revolt against every form of use and order which tradition sanctions. And how different this is from the sad wail of our modern agnostic poetry must

appear in the hastiest comparison. The keynote, the very ground-tone of such poetry, is poignant and unavailing regret. It touches its deepest and most pathetic chords in dirges and lamentings, in farewells to the dying faiths and requiems for the dead. The air is full of such notes of sorrow, the tremblings of unmistakable distress, the vague and wild vibrations of a woe too deep for words. Its very sadness is its fascination, for to many minds the holding of a doubt seems a vastly finer thing than the holding of a creed. And although it must be distinctly acknowledged that doubt, like other things, may become a fashion, and poetic doubt may be the mere affectation of an affectation, yet it may be admitted that the bulk of our agnostic poetry is too evidently sincere :

“ A fever in the pages burns
 Beneath the calm they feign ;
 A wounded human spirit turns
 Here, on its bed of pain.”

And it is this very sincerity which makes it so formidable and forcible an influence in moulding the age. Sincerity and sadness, welded together in high poetic achievement, must in

any age of the world win hearing and allegiance; for is it not too common a characteristic of the race itself, full of unsatisfied desires and instincts as it is, to listen rather to "the still, sad music of humanity" than to the voice that sings good cheer?

Every generalization has its exceptions, and there are exceptions here. The old revolutionary note of Byron and Shelley still vibrates, and the old revolutionary hope still burns. But for the most part we have grown too familiar with revolutions to expect any swift or bright millennium from the noblest of conspirators or the most magnanimous of patriots.

Mr. Swinburne still hurls Byronic defiance, and cherishes the hope of Shelley; he leaps upon the altar he has made, and when he can withdraw himself from singing in the Lesbian orgies chants before the face of Baal in democratic odes and vituperative sonnets. But he stands alone. The latter poetic movement has scarcely heart enough for joining in any song so strenuous; it is saddened with its disillusionings; it is satiated with its gains; it is emasculated in its energies, and what offensive

power it has left is mainly spent in small sneers against the tyranny of creeds and sympathetic lamentation over the decay of ancient faiths and pieties.

The culmination of this spirit of sincere and saddened doubt is found in the poetry of Matthew Arnold, and a very brief analysis of a very small portion of his writings is sufficient to indicate its scope and character. He has described himself as

“Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,”

as an exiled Greek on some far northern strand,
thinking of his own gods,

“In pity and mournful awe might stand
Before some fallen Runic stone;
For both were faiths, and both are gone.”

It must be a matter of somber gratification to the poet to know that the critical public has generally consented to accept him at his own estimate, and that he is described as a modern Greek oftener than by any other phrase; just as Goethe is rightly described as a modern pagan. But between the Hellenism of Goethe

and that of Matthew Arnold there are wide differences. A great critic has described Goethe's Hellenism as "the completeness and serenity of a watchful, exigent intellectualism;" and Matthew Arnold's expressed admiration for "the wide and luminous view of Goethe" leads us to infer that there might be no description he would more earnestly covet or endeavor to deserve. But Goethe's paganism is simply indifferent to all forms of modern faith, and is without moral predilection, while Arnold's is full of wistfulness and yearning. The mission which Arnold has to proclaim is, that with the best desires and intentions toward belief, unfortunately he cannot believe. So far from being a modern pagan he has described in lines of great strength and beauty precisely where the cardinal failure and corruption of ancient paganism lay:

"On that hard pagan world disgust
And secret loathing fell;
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell.

"Stout was its arm; each thew and bone
Seemed puissant and alive,
But, ah! its heart, its heart was stone,
And so it could not thrive."

He looks with wistful rapture backward to the hour of the first victories of the Christian faith, and cries :

“ O, had I lived in that great day,
 How had its glory new
 Filled earth and heaven, and caught away
 My ravished spirit too !”

It is, perhaps, unnecessary to remark that he who will not believe “ Moses and the prophets ” is not likely to believe even if “ one rose from the dead.” The poet who sings agnosticism in the nineteenth century would probably have sung any thing but *Te Deums* in the first. Still, it is of painful interest to note how faith, so long repressed, bursts forth into momentary triumphant assertion, and cleaves to the Crucified when the cross is removed to the second century. What cannot be done in a modern England corrupted by “ beer-shops ” and “ dissent,” * what it is impossible to accomplish with the eyes of Strauss upon us, and agnostic reviews around us, might perhaps have been attempted in that dim be-

* In his eloquent article on “ Isaiah of Jerusalem ” in the *Nineteenth Century*, Mr. Matthew Arnold, in enumerating the “ hinderances with which religion in this country has to contend,” places at the head of the list, “ beer-shops, Dissent !”

ginning of years, when at least the great delusion was new and beautiful :

“No thoughts that to the world belong
Had stood against the wave
Of love which set so deep and strong
From Christ’s then open grave.

“No lonely life had passed too slow,
When I could hourly scan
Upon his cross, with head sunk low,
That nailed, thorn-crownèd man.”

Yet in the poetry of Matthew Arnold faith is but an artistic freak. The voice of modern denial speedily re-affirms :

“Now He is dead ! Far hence he lies
In the lone Syrian town ;
And on his grave, with shining eyes
The Syrian stars look down.”

There is nothing left for it but to toil on in a waste and weary world full of “forts of folly” manned by coarse Philistines, or to “let the long contention cease,” and, like the kings of modern thought, be dumb : “silent—the best are silent now.” Some vague and visionary religion of humanity may still be possible :

“He only lives in the world’s life
Who hath renounced his own.”

Some vaguer pantheism may perchance explain the future ; in the last hour let not needless priest nor friend be near ; but rather let the poet look forth from the open window on "the wide aerial landscape bathed in the sacred dew of morn," and rejoice to know he will speedily be absorbed in "the pure eternal course of life," and be one with that he gazes on. For his father he shall sing the noblest of dirges, for he was one of the strong souls who led the wavering lines of humanity

"On to the bound of the waste,
On to the city of God,"

and stood in the end of the day like a good shepherd with his flock in his hand. But the son is one of those who comes at last to the inn of death alone, and is barely saved out of the peril in which so many comrades have fallen. Surely there can be no more desolate intellectual outlook than this, and it is not surprising that it is the source of the most mournful poetry.

This is by no means the place to discuss the actual condition of the Christian faith, and did we dare to dissent from the verdict which Matthew Arnold and his school have returned

against it we should no doubt be immediately catechized as Philistines who are blind to facts, and as optimists who are what they are because they are ignorant. But we may at least be permitted to remark that religious doubt and modern poetry appear to have united themselves in a most unhappy marriage, and are in their most fascinating guise but an ill-assorted couple. The greatest treasures of our English poetry are the product of an age of faith, and were scarcely possible without some wise and deep belief. It was in an age when religion was the paramount subject in English politics and national thought that Spenser and Shakespeare flourished; it was at the conclusion of the greatest war for conscience' sake which any nation has known, and by the pen of a man who more than any other embodied in his own person the stern and holy ardors of the period, that our greatest epic poem was produced; and amid all the loud thunder of the Revolution-time Wordsworth's spirit caught the first rising music of the new age of faith, and that new age of faith fitly inspired his serene and pious strain. The fact is, religious faith is inextricably interwoven with

our English poetry; it has given it fullness and serenity, and it will secure it permanence. We have never yet written "Crush the Infamous" upon the banners of our literature; we have never clothed a harlot in the garb of Reason and called her goddess; we have never yet consented, and never shall consent, to the monstrous modern theory that art can know no morals. We have been spared the demoralization of many alternate tyrannies and revolutions, and so surely has our ordered freedom grown out of our religious life that we may well believe there is some force in hereditary ideas which must ever make a faithless poetry foreign to the English mind. Folk-lore tells us how it is an ancient superstition that mandrakes when torn from the ground shriek in their every root and fiber like dumb living things driven into sudden speech by anguish. May we not apply the fable and declare that poetry dragged from its immemorial rooting in the soil of faith shrieks aloud and becomes a thing of anguish and despair? It is a fatal experiment; it will not and it cannot come to good. It is too late to try to turn the tide of English literature; it has set too long upon

the sunny shores of faith to ebb at last toward the icy solitudes of apostolic indifference and despair. The English mind will never yield a wide attention to any modern Lucretius in the person of a Matthew Arnold, singing his despairing ode concerning "The Nature of Things;" and still less will it "dance to the piping of an educated satyr" in the person of Mr. Swinburne.

Indeed, the more the matter is considered the more evident does it become that religious doubt has exercised nothing but a destructive influence on English poetry. Edgar Allan Poe, in one of the most weird and wonderful of his extraordinary stories, pictures a perplexed and noble genius in the act of suicide. As the clock strikes, and the clear day shines into the perfumed and splendid chamber, the suicide lifts a costly crystal goblet to his lips and pledges his last hour in the fatal draught. When the drained chalice is set down again, behold it is cracked and blackened. In like manner our modern genius sits in garish misery and fills the crystal cup of poesy, which should be for the healing of the nations, with its poison-draught of doubt; but when the cup

is set down again it is cracked and blackened. It is not wholly destroyed; but it is hopelessly disfigured by the base uses to which the unworthy put it. To use a choice and beautiful Venetian goblet to hold the black draught of acrid poison is no greater prostitution than to make poetry, which is the handmaiden of faith, minister to denial. If the light that is within the poet be darkness "how great is that darkness!" The very spring of thought is broken, the very light of song is quenched; the poet is like a pianist who plays with one hand and on few notes; more than half the chords are dumb, and the full compass of the instrument he can never reach.

Let any student rise from the perusal of such poetry as that which A. H. Clough has written and say whether this be not the real impression made upon his mind. Here is undoubted faculty for song; but this note may not be struck, for it is too high; nor this, for it is too divinely deep; and so the poet veils his face, and his voice is heard only in faint whispers and warring thoughts and wailings of an infinite distress. The poet can "only soar in one direction," it has been said; but if the

blue heavens be closed and unattainable what else can he do other than limp along the common earth, with trailing wings and wounded heart, pouring out the sad wild notes of an irremediable woe?

It may of course be said that Tennyson and Browning, incomparably the two greatest poets of our time, have in nowise stood aside from the great controversy of disputed faiths, and that their poetry nevertheless is marked by majestic strength and the noblest artistic completeness. Indeed, in both poets we have distinct and splendid poems wholly devoted to the discussion of moral and religious doubt. In such poems as "Easter Day" and "Christmas Eve" Browning may be said to have hunted certain forms of skepticism home to their

"Inmost room
With lens and scalpel"

of the most acute and brilliant analysis. And in poems like "The Two Voices," "The Palace of Art," and above all the "In Memoriam," which stands in unassailable fame above all comparison, Tennyson has wrestled with the toughest doubts that have strained the thews

and sinews of the mind since the day when
Socrates,

“ Fired with burning faith in God and right,
Doubted men’s doubts away.”

But it must at once appear that the discussion of doubt is a very different thing from the profession of denial. Life will never cease to be mysterious, and while life is full of mystery doubt will never cease. A gray under-roof of mystery shuts us down ; a deep sea of mystery moans and thunders at our feet. There are awful moments of eclipse through which the strongest spirit may be called to pass ; sorrows come upon us not alone, but in companies, and sweep all before them ; we move for a while amid such starless desolation, and such waves and billows have passed over us, that it may well happen that our feet have almost slipped.

Let the Book of Job serve us for an illustration. The great drama of the trial of Job opens with the scene of Job worshiping in the very moment when the last messenger has reached him with the bitterest of all his evil tidings ; and it closes with the victory of faith, with the patriarch once more worshiping, so that the latter end of Job is more blessed than

his beginning. Now, throughout the history doubt is only stated as the foil to faith ; it falls with the blackness of eclipse for a little space, but obeys the law of the eclipse and vanishes at last, leaving the sun shining in his strength. It is precisely in this spirit that both Tennyson and Browning deal with the problems of religious doubt. There are two voices, but the triumph of the great argument does not remain with the mocking voice. There is a "vision of sin," but its black and bitter cynicism dies at last in a faint, mysterious dawning splendor ; and though the divine voice speaks in a tongue no man can understand, yet its final utterance is on the side of hope. In the "In Memoriam" we have the dense thunder-cloud, and even the rolling of the thunder, but there comes at last a season of clear shining, when a serene and holy light fills earth and heaven. The great chords of wailing die away, one by one, into the murmurous joy of infinite hallelujahs ; the purposes of loss are seen, the chastening of bereavement is achieved, the wine of sorrow has been drunk, the heavens of song are purged and clear, and in their unfathomable depths there gleam the

dimly outlined walls of the city where He dwells who has made all things new, and where those lost from earth have larger life and holier knowledge. It is true some "bitter notes" his harp has given, but

"Hope has never lost its youth."

"If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep
I heard a voice, 'Believe no more,'
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the godless deep ;

"A warmth within the heart would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answered, 'I have felt.'"

The reason of the heart has proved itself victor over the reason of the intellect, for it was diviner. Wailings in the night there may have been, and cryings after light, amid blind clamor and doubt and fear—

"Then was I as a child that cries,
But crying, knows his father near ;"

and in the light of this great spiritual victory the whole problem of the tangled world grows clear; the world is safe in God's hands, and already there are prophetic signs and heraldings of its full redemption—

"That one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves."

Not less unmistakably has Robert Browning declared himself a singer upon the side of faith. He is a stronger and deeper man than Tennyson; an incompleter artist, but a greater poet; and his method of approaching doubt wholly differs from Tennyson's. He loves to assault it with sardonic humor, to undermine it with subtle suggestion, even to break out into grim laughter as it slowly disintegrates and falls into a cloud of dust before his victorious analysis. But not the less does he sympathize with whatever there may be of, spiritual yearning, of earnest but baffled purpose in it; and no poet has ever been quicker than he to place in the fullest light of tender recognition the one redeeming quality there may be latent in the thing he hates. For faith, in Robert Browning, is a spiritual fire that never burns low. Through whatever labyrinth of guilt or passion he may lead his readers, God is ever the attending presence, in whose hands all the ravelled skeins of life lie distinct and clear:

"He glows above,
With scarce an intervention, presses close and palpitatingly."

Human life is lived out in every instance beneath the eye of God, and it is the failure to

recognize this which is the beginning of all evils in human character. The lightning which startles the guilty lovers hidden in the deep forest is in truth God's sword, plunged again and again through the thick cloud to find them, for they cannot flee from him; and the prison-roof of life that shuts the mourner in will assuredly break some day, and "heaven beam overhead." Whenever Browning walks amid the shadows of human mystery—and darker glooms no poet has moved through—he sees the star of faith shining overhead, he hears the voice of God bidding him be of good cheer. David, as he sings in the black tent before Saul, bids him think of his mother held up on her death-bed, and bids him again

"Hear her faint tongue
Joining in while it could to the witness,
 'Let one more attest
I have lived, seen God's hand through a life-time, and all was
 for best.'"

Little Pippa, as she passes out for her brief holiday, her light feet moving innocent amid all the crime and tragedy of life, sings:

"The year's at the spring,
Morning's at seven,
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
God's in his heaven,—
All's right with the world."

It is the poet's own soul that sings in little Pippa ; this faith of his that all is right never deserts him. He will discuss doubt, but as a strong man who has overcome it ; he will admit it to his temple of song, but he sternly relegates it to its own place, and will allow it no supremacy. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the greatness of Robert Browning as a poet is in no small measure due to his greatness as a believer.

The first direct result of the presence of doubt in modern poetry is found in that note of weariness and sadness by which it is distinguished. Its household gods are too clearly shattered ; it is beside the waters of Babylon the poet sits and sings. We do not by any means seek to prove that the element of sadness which we find in all exquisite poetry invariably owes its origin to loss of faith, for no conclusion could be more falsely partial. Perhaps the noblest pages in the literature of all nations are the saddest. The spirit of Dante moves between infinite light and gloom, wearing ever a crown of sharpest sorrow ; the majestic woe of the blind and aged Milton has not yet ceased to thrill upon the world's ear ;

even the serene genius of Wordsworth finds thoughts that "lie too deep for tears." Earthly life is so full of incompleteness, is so often baffled in its highest purposes, is so often mocked in the moment of its sublimest yearnings, and has so many chapters in its book of years steeped in deepest pathos that it may well be

" Our sweetest songs are those
That tell of saddest thought."

But then life is not wholly sorrowful, and the poetry misjudges life which interprets it alone by tears. Dante has his beatific vision, his "Paradiso" following close upon his "Purgatory;" and out of the great blackness and desertion of that blind old age of Milton rises the sublime "cathedral music" of his "Paradise Lost" and the hopeful closing vision of his "Paradise Regained." The exquisite sadness of regret, of memory, of vanished hopes and broken fellowships, will ever be one of the noblest elements in any noble poetry.

But all this is very different from that *personal* note of weariness and sad dissatisfaction which is heard so loudly in our later poetry. The greater poets write little of themselves; the lesser modern poets write of little but

themselves. Their chief inspiration is too frequently a sort of cynical melancholy. They have been disillusioned; there is nothing new and nothing true—and no matter! The most morbid introspection is interwoven with the saddest worldly wisdom. Few of them, indeed, are there who

“Do but sing because they must,
And pipe but as the linnet sings.”

What Matthew Arnold has called the “lyrical cry” is genuinely heard ever and again, but too often, while the weariness is sincere enough, the verse falls into spasmodic affectations. We feel while we read that there is no “natural piety” linking day to day in the lives of such poets. The fresh and clear delights of Nature are obscured; the cheerful gospels of the singing birds and sunny day are dumb; life is bred upon a hotbed of morbid thought, is passed in feverish turbulence, or creeps on “wounded wing,” and the poetry which expresses it is a melodious spasm or a fitful and exceeding bitter cry. How can it be otherwise when the divine aspects of life are blotted out? What bird can sing in full-throated ease beneath a threatening thunder-cloud? Faith

has ever been the inspiration of the grandest human heroisms, the noblest human thoughts; what wonder that the clew of life is lost when faith is lost? Simplicity has always been the crown of highest genius; what marvel is it that when the simple heart is lost the whole world of thought falls into mournful bewilderment and weariness? There are many pages in Tennyson which teach us how dangerous it is even for the strongest nature to drink long and deeply of the bitter draught of doubt, how even the final faith of later days cannot wholly heal the old wounds that still "ache and cry."

A second result from loss of faith in our modern poetry is the undisguised and contaminating sensuality which has latterly infected it. In both Tennyson and Browning we meet every-where a profound moral sense. In the poem of "The Palace of Art" we have a distinct and memorable sermon preached upon the world-old text that the noblest culture and the purest art become destroying forces when divorced from moral fervor; that even when unstained by any breath of baser passion they end inevitably in isolation and despair and

the broken-hearted cry of "All is vanity." The need of some diviner salvation than art can offer haunts with persistent bitterness the human spirit sheltered in its selfish splendor ; at last it falls, like Herod, "struck through with pangs of hell ;" it is on fire within and howls aloud,

"What is it that will take away my sin,
And save me lest I die?"

The "Palace of Art" is a sermon for which the age owes Lord Tennyson profound gratitude. How much it is needed we can judge when we remember how often of late years we have heard high critical authorities insisting that art must be loved for art's sake, and that our common notions of morality are wholly opposed to art. We could forgive Mr. Swinburne the frantic sound and fury of his revolutionary odes, but we cannot forgive him when he prostitutes his noble gifts to uphold the monstrous thesis that the priciest poetry is that which deals in the prurient details of "fleshly fever" and "amorous malady." The laureate calls upon *his* soul to

"Arise and fly
The reeling Faun, the sensual feast ;
Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die."

But it is precisely in the filthy carnival of "ape and tiger" that Mr. Swinburne has chosen to sport. The whole subject is one which will not bear handling, and, for our part, we have no desire to publish any investigations in putrescence. Such poetry can only be labeled as "unfit for human consumption." Certain of its admirers have ventured to call it "Greek;" but it is not Greek, it is simply bestial. It is the lowest and most revolting phase of the evil wrought in literature through lack of faith. That lack of faith inevitably leads to such a depth of moral fall we do not say, but we do say that such poetry is in itself an awful illustration of how swiftly godless art may become immoral art.

Here, then, we may fitly close this fragmentary study of one phase in modern English poetry. It is a phase which must be full of sad suggestion alike to the philosophic thinker and the Christian. The fatal *narrowing* tendency which attends the intellectual processes of skepticism is nowhere seen in a more startling light than in its action upon poetry. The freshness and spontaneity of song is lost, the lyrical cry becomes a lyrical wail, simplicity

and fullness of emotion become unknown, and the imagination, having lost courage for any thing like colossal effort, is frittered away and wastes itself in spasmodic and often morbid creation. There is no clearer lesson taught us by the history of human thought and action than that the greatest deed and utterance are impossible without the serenity and courage which spring from living faith in God. There is no compensation for the loss of faith in poetry. Doubt may sometimes lift its cup full of the wine of misery to the poet's lips, and he shall drink and find a certain bitter exhilaration in the draught which fires the mind with brief poetic *fervor*, but that throb of short and daring effort is all too dearly purchased. The world asks that its poets shall be prophets, that its singers shall be believers, that their inspiration shall be drawn from above, else it were better that their gift died in them and their song were never sung.

The key-stone in the arch of life is God; if once the poet pluck that down what wonder is it that all his life falls straightway into illimitable despair and ruin? What wonder that the stars fade one by one above him, until at

last he sits in cities of dreadful night and bows his head, and only asks to die? In poetry, as in philosophy, it is needful to insist upon the abiding power and presence of the religious instinct. All outrage done to that is outrage upon that which is noblest in humanity. It brings its revenges with it, and the Nemesis which follows skepticism in poetry is confusion and paralysis of power and effort. Nor is it possible, as Tennyson has shown us, for any man to be even indifferent to the religious instinct and yet be a great poet. It is not given to the mightiest genius to

“Sit as god holding no form of creed,
But contemplating all.”

In attempting to shun the most solemn problems of the universe, and work out for himself a perfect intellectual culture, such a poet simply builds a palace of art, whose splendid corridors ring at last with his despair, and all whose glory he is glad to barter for a cottage in the vale where he may mourn and pray. The religious instincts of the race have always been the secret springs which have led the great poetry of the world; and the iconoclast who would propose to himself the daring

programme of eliminating faith in God from the poetic literature of England would speedily discover that his proposition meant the destruction of every thing which the common consent of four centuries has voted best worth preserving.

From Robert Browning we may take one line which should be the first article in any poet's creed:

"Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure."

From the verse of him "who uttered nothing base," we may quote what seems to us as beautiful a conception of the poet as poet ever uttered, and one which our generation were wise in laying to heart: the true poet is

"One in whom persuasion and belief
Have ripened into faith, and faith become
A passionate intuition."

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

THE death of the poet Longfellow removed a familiar name from the roll of living celebrities, painfully reminding us how fast the giants of our generation are falling. The round table of the Victorian age of fame shows many empty seats, and there are already significant signs that the old order changeth, yielding place to new. The foremost workers and thinkers of our day are old men, to many of whom the award of fame has come tardily, and from whom little more victorious achievement can be hoped for. The perfect work of a poet is usually that of his middle-manhood, and as seldom that of his latest as of his earliest years. America cannot expect any further important contribution to her literature from the serene genius of the inheritor of Longfellow's fame, J. Greenleaf Whittier, the "Hermit of Amesbury;" and we must confess that neither England nor America has given any sign at present of a great poet who is likely to succeed to the throne of a Tennyson or a

Browning, a Longfellow or a Whittier. In the moment of common loss, when the master-hand falls into the long sloth of death, and the work is fresh with the final touches of its "cunning," it may be said we are not likely to form a just estimate of the powers of a departed poet, such as future ages will indorse. We can, however, seek to form some proximate idea of the value of the legacy bequeathed to us; and it is both a graceful and fitting thing that the hour of death should be the signal for such a task.

The outward landmarks of the life of Longfellow are few, and call for no special notice. He was fortunate enough to obtain a professorship of modern languages in Bowdoin College, Brunswick, at the age of twenty, exchanging it six years later for a similar post in Harvard College, Cambridge, where he succeeded Mr. George Ticknor. This post he held until 1854, when he retired to the quiet country house where his last labors were completed and his last hours spent. He more than once traveled widely on the continent of Europe, leaving the beaten pathways of the mere tourist and seeking the still waters and

green pastures of national life and character in its rural solitudes. On his last visit to England, in 1868, he was received with acclamation and awarded honorary degrees by both the ancient universities.

His life was singularly tranquil, though not unvisited by those sadder of God's angels, against whom, as he reminds us, the strongest cannot close the door, and the best would not if they dared. It was never his lot to be the target of controversy or the by-word of the slanderer; no foul-lipped or malicious criticism has vexed the poet's soul; on the contrary, his claim as a poet has been heartily acknowledged from the first, and his fame has been wide and constantly increasing. When we remember the long and painful struggles of many of our older poets for standing-room and hearing, and the slow and doubting recognition awarded to our most famous living poets, it should surely be accounted a happy thing that there were quick ears in the world to catch the earliest song of this singer, and generous hearts to welcome and applaud it. Immediate space to work, sincere and ungrudging praise, a life of quiet literary toil, serenity and growth

of intellect, length of days, an old age full of honor, and the mourning of two continents—all this reads like a young poet's idyllic dream of life rather than the narration of prosaic facts.

Longfellow had reached the comparatively stable age of thirty-two when his first modest volume of original poems, *Voices of the Night*, was given to the public. It is no detraction from his great merit to infer that his power of self-restraint must have been enormous, or that he was wanting in the impetuous fire of temperament which has marked the development of some of the world's greatest poets. At the age when Longfellow launched his first skiff of song upon the wandering sea of opinion Burns and Byron had produced their finest work, and at even an earlier period Keats and Shelley had written all that the world can judge them by. Probably something may be traced to both the above suggestive clauses. Longfellow has himself reminded us:

"Art is long, and time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave."

His lofty conceptions of the dignity of his art would not permit him hastily to challenge

the verdict of the public ; least of all by any thing crude in form or unpolished in expression. The attentive student of English poetry will have observed among the foremost signs of our own times an exactitude of expression, a delicacy and subtleness of phrase, and a degree of reserve and suggestiveness in the poetry of his own generation which may almost be taken as its distinguishing quality. We do not mean that the older poets of the century display no suggestiveness and finish of phrase, because this is one of the most marked accomplishments of all true poets, and of none in higher degree than Shakespeare. But in the older poets the apt and splendid phrase seems to leap into being without effort, while in the younger it is manifestly the result of patient, and even painful, effort. On the one hand, we cannot but admire the consummate patience which holds back the poetic genius until the fermenting crudities of youth have worked themselves clear ; and we recognize the result in poems which are as perfect in form as they are chaste and polished in expression. On the other hand, we miss the Titanic power that bursts the bondage of form, creating

for itself new types in the unhewn granite of its own originality. The truly great artist obeys, but is unconscious of his art.

“He does but sing because he must,
And pipes but as the linnets sing.”

It is pretty sure to follow that the young wings will dare the ether before their strength is perfect, and will droop, and even fail disastrously; but it often follows that at last they soar into a vaster heaven, whose heights and depths remain forever closed to spirits less daring.

And in truth Longfellow has always shown a nice discernment of the limitation of his own powers, and has not invited failure by attempting too much. It is mere nonsense that assigns to any genius the illimitable; every artist has boundaries which he may not cross, and the truer the artist the more carefully does he abstain from any truant raid into another's kingdom. Longfellow has carefully marked out the frontiers of his domain, and within these he has moved with ease as undisputed lord. He is pre-eminently the poet of the household and the affections. He has never indulged in the slanderous wail of the pamphleteering or poetic pessimist; and still

less has he pandered to the obscene delirium of those modern singers whose heritage of infamy it is to have founded what is termed "the fleshly school." He has sung of virtue and manliness, of self-restraint and self-sacrifice, the dignity of labor, and the hidden purposes of suffering. He is not unconscious of the sealed enigmas of life which have no perfect answer here; he does not stifle those solemn questionings which moan like an unquiet wind through the chambers of the heart in the darker moments of experience and thought; but neither does he coquet with doubt or probe the mystery with morbid interest and sensational result. A genial wisdom, a healthful cheerfulness, a living faith in God's goodness and the wisdom of his purposes, pervade his pages; and of the harder riddles of this life he has learned to say:

"Let us be patient! These severe afflictions
Not from the ground arise;
But oftentimes celestial benedictions
Assume this dark disguise.

"We see but dimly through the mist and vapors,
Amid these earthly damps:
What seem to us but sad, funereal tapers
May be heaven's distant lamps."

It is no lowly gift which enables a human soul to sing forth in imperishable words the sacred joys and sorrows of domestic life. The world needs many poets to keep the fountains of emotion fresh with the sweet troubling of sympathy and sentiment; but the poets of the hearth and household are needed more than any. Such poets may not quicken the impulses of intellectual life, but they do as needful and as great a work; they purify the atmosphere of the emotions and sweeten the brackish waters of earthly discipline. We are told in the preface of one of the latest and most beautiful of the innumerable editions of Longfellow's poems that the publishers have found Longfellow more in request than any poet save Shakespeare. Of course any attempt to draw a parallel between Shakespeare and Longfellow would be simply absurd. But men cannot help asking on what is such an enormous popularity based? If any poet, not a hymnist, be found upon the cottage tables of our artisans, and in the humble homes of our peasantry, that poet is likelier to be Longfellow than any other; and there are probably thousands of persons, not habitual students of

literature, though otherwise well-informed and intelligent, who scarcely know whether Longfellow was an Englishman or an American.

What marvelous combination of splendid faculties has conspired to make this man the most widely-read poet of two hemispheres of English-speaking people? The probable answer is found in the household character, the tender, Christian spirit of his poetry. Moreover, he is easily read. There are no obscure passages, which might be construed backward as intelligibly as forward. His verse is limpid as a running brook, and as full of music; it glorifies, but does not drown the thought. He writes in clear, strong, nervous English; and his lines have the power of clinging to the memory. Few men have already told a story in verse with a more simple directness, and in lines so compact and ringing. And this is the sort of poetry by which the universal heart is always won. The scholar loves the veiled meaning underlying classic form; the intellectual reader ponders on the subtle beauty, the shadowy and suggestive grace of lines that fascinate by their very indefiniteness of outline; but the heart of the people will

always turn to the troubadour, the story-teller, the man whose clear and simple thought chooses for the raiment the clearest and simplest language. It is half a fashion in the present day to admire obscurity, and value a poet according to the number of utterly incoherent and contradictory meanings which may be extracted from any given line. In the face of such a fashion, which a coterie would fain persuade us is the higher criticism, it is well to remember that the most popular poet of our own day is one of the most lucid of English writers, and owes his popularity in no small degree to the definite directness of his style.

The great need in criticism is breadth and sanity; the power to distinguish justly the thing that is good after its kind upon its own merits; and the great danger in criticism is bigotry, subservience to the tyranny of an isolated and perhaps false theory. Thus the reproach against Longfellow, that he is commonplace, is founded upon his manifest lack of certain qualities which constitute the greatness of his contemporaries. But because he has not the mellow and sometimes over-ripe sweetness of Tennyson, nor the subtlety

of Browning, it is not fair to forget that he has certain gifts of his own which are not to be despised. A cameo may be as fine a work of art as a painting crowded with the angels of Fra Angelico; and the song of a thrush in the fresh glory of an April morning may throb with as real and beautiful a music as a great organ "trumpeting" melodious thunder "from its golden lips." The place that Longfellow claims is the place of a singer in the great temple, and if his voice has not the resonant volume of the great masters, it has the delightful flute-like freshness of the choir-boy's unspoiled alto.

We have pointed out the absence of creative originality in his poetry; and we confess that the artistic error which most easily besets him is the proneness to moralize, appending to every simple song of thought or action its appropriate lesson, as the moral is appended to the fable. But all that this proves is that he is debarred from equality with the great creative poets; and it does not invalidate his right to a place as honorable, if not as high, among the second rank of poets. Longfellow has suffered from the very vastness of his popularity. He is read in the days of youth; and

books that are read too early are apt to be forgotten in the later and maturer years of life. Defoe and Bunyan build up their gleaming wonderland round the steps of childhood, and for that very reason are seldom re-read, until the distracted taste, wearied with novelty and surfeited with the feverish brilliancy of modern styles, is glad to turn again in the evening of life to the immortal pages which made the marvel and the heaven of life's morning. The common and almost inevitable result is that such masterpieces are underrated; and this has been the penalty of Longfellow's enormous popularity with the young. But let the reader take up again the pages so familiar to his boyhood, and let him include in his survey the maturer works of the poet, and he will probably be astonished at the sweetness and grace, the power and inspiration, of poems which he read in the holiday moments of a school-boy's life or in the idle interval between school and business.

What, then, are the special qualities by which Longfellow will be known in the days to come, and by the authority of which he may claim the bays of the accepted poet?

His greatest claim to the seat of earthly fame will undoubtedly be that he is the first truly American poet. But such a statement has important reservations, which must be remembered before it can be discussed. It will have escaped no one that a very large number of Longfellow's poems are cast in mediæval molds. He lingers lovingly over the parchment scroll written thickly with the fancies of the days of yore ; he is familiar with "the great cloister's stillness and seclusion ;" he watches with a sympathetic eye the patient monk working amid the dusk on the emblazoned page, and praying while he works,

" Take it, Lord, and let it be
As something I have done for thee."

He has adopted many a quaint turn of monkish fancy, and is at home with the weird wonders of monkish superstition. And few poets have translated from the songs and ballads of other nations so largely as he. Admirable and scholarly translations from the French, German, Spanish, Swedish, and Norwegian languages are scattered thickly through his works, while Dante has absorbed his constant attention and has found in him a clear and truth-

ful interpreter. But when we have made these important reservations, when we have glanced over the long list of translations, the poems with foreign titles and full of foreign yearnings, the ballads drawn from the histories of all nations, and bearing in their every fiber the stamp of the Old World inspiration, the fact remains that Longfellow is the author of the three most distinctively American poems in the world. In one of the interludes to the "Tales of a Wayside Inn," when the "long murmur of applause" had died away—

" 'These tales you tell are one and all
Of the Old World,' the poet said,
'Flowers gathered from a crumbling wall,
Dead leaves that rustle as they fall ;
Let me present you in their stead
Something of our New England earth,
A tale which, though of no great worth,
Has still its merit, that it yields
A certain freshness of the fields,
A sweetness as of home-made bread.' "

This is precisely what Longfellow has done for the poetry of his country. Any English writer with equal gifts, living in any English county, might have written the measured verse of Bryant, or the serious poems of Lowell, or the bulk of the poetry of Whittier ; but no purely

English writer could have composed "Miles Standish," "Evangeline," or "Hiawatha."

It has been said that America has every thing but a past. Longfellow has shown that his country is not deficient even in this item of national wealth by successfully unsealing the fountains of her early Puritan history and weaving into the original cadences of one of the longest poems of the century the strange dreams and gospels of her ancient Indian mythology. "Hiawatha" exhales the very fragrance of the broad prairie and illimitable forest, and is steeped in an atmosphere peculiarly and perfectly its own; "Evangeline," the "tale of Acadie," presents a lovely picture of the idyllic side of Puritan existence, its sweet homeliness, its purity and faith, its restrained but tremulous and intense passion; "Miles Standish" is a rougher transcript of Puritan life, but equally perfect in verisimilitude and suppressed humor; and each poem is one which the world will not willingly let die. Whatever vast advances the literature of America may make in the future—and we have the right to expect a marvelous development in the literature of a nation so young, so strong,

so fertile in resource and eager in invention—we may safely prophesy that these three poems will never sink into obscurity. They are three great landmarks in the advancement of American history which can never be wholly submerged. And if “Hiawatha” and “Miles Standish” in any future age attract the attention only of the antiquary or the critical student of his country’s literature, “Evangeline” will share the nobler fate of a sympathetic welcome from all ages capable of understanding a great poem whose highest charm is simplicity, and especially in that land where its writer lived and died, and from whose past its history is drawn.

We have not space for any elaborate analysis of the purely literary characteristics of Longfellow; it is rather to the high moral value of his writings that we would draw attention. But these literary characteristics may be briefly indicated. Those who accuse Longfellow of mere prettiness of phrase and commonplaceness of design must be singularly blind to the exquisite fancy which is found in all his work, and not infrequently the rare power of a vivid and minute imagination. In

such sea-songs as "The Wreck of the Hesperus," "The Phantom Ship," and especially the "Ballad of Carmilhan," we detect the true master's touch; the high and rare power of painting a perfect picture in perfect words. It would be hard to discover ten simple lines which describe the bursting of a storm at sea more perfectly than these from the last-mentioned poem :

"Eight bells ! and suddenly abaft
 With a great rush of rain,
 Making the ocean white with spume,
 In darkness like the day of doom,
 On came the hurricane.

"The lightning flashed from cloud to cloud,
 And tore the dark in two ;
 A jagged flame, a single jet
 Of white fire, like a bayonet,
 That pierced his eyeballs through."

So in the ballad of "Scanderbeg" there are lines terse, powerful, and ringing, as ballad lines should be, and instinct with the same quality of casting into clear relief the bodiless vision of the mind. And where there is not the higher triumph of imagination there is always the delicate filagree-work of a pure and tender fancy. Many an exquisite line, and

more than one perfect lyric, has been written on the lark, but Longfellow's lines may still be uttered with delight :

“ Up soared the lark into the air,
A shaft of song, a wingèd prayer,
As if a soul, released from pain,
Were flying back to heaven again.”

Sometimes this power of fancy runs into quaintness, as when he speaks of the cares of the day folding their tents like the Arabs, and as silently stealing away ; and sometimes it approaches the grotesque, as when he speaks of the moon shining on the snow which covers a poet's grave, and the broad sheet of snow

“ Written o'er
With shadows cruciform of leafless trees,
As once the winding-sheet of Saladin
With chapters of the Koran.”

But far oftener the fancy casts light upon the facets of some simple image, and causes them to glow with a serene spiritual beauty, as in the musings of the abbot in “The Golden Legend : ”

“ Slowly, slowly up the wall
Steals the sunshine, steals the shade.

Upward steals the life of man
As the sunshine from the wall.

From the wall into the sky,
 From the roof along the spire ;
 Ah ! the souls of those that die
 Are but sunbeams lifted higher."

It is needless to quote where every retentive memory can supply its favorite example. There is scarcely a poem which does not manifest the same delicate power of admirable fancy, if not of fervid imagination.

And it would be still more impertinent to quote examples of the sweetness and pathos which have made so many of Longfellow's poems household words. How many hearts have thrilled to the subduing pathos of the lines :

" There is no flock, however watched and tended,
 But one dead lamb is there ;
 There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
 But has one vacant chair !"

How many aged eyes have looked upon the forms of little children with the same instinctive forecast of the future which Longfellow expresses in such lines as these :

" O little feet ! that such long years
 Must wander on through hopes and fears,
 Must ache and bleed beneath your load ;
 I, nearer to the wayside inn,
 Where toil shall end and rest begin,
 Am weary, thinking of your road !"

It is one of the distinctive charms of Longfellow that he is the children's poet ; the fresh grace, the agile hope, the dew-like purity of the child's heart and mind perpetually fascinate him. More than once he takes a little child and sets him in the midst of the world's feverish circle, preaching by the child's innocence the highest of all lessons. To say that the conception and thought of such poems as "Resignation" is what any average man of sentiment might feel is not to depreciate them, but to confer the highest praise. It is virtually to acknowledge the supremacy of the poet by confessing that he has interpreted in melodious verse and with just appreciation the sentiment of millions. Such poems as "Excelsior" and "A Psalm of Life" are world-poems and are numbered among the "secular hymns" of humanity. That they are hackneyed is the highest compliment that can be paid them ; it means that they have entered into the world's heart and are on every tongue. Loftier praise than this can scarcely be awarded any poet, for it requires a rare adjustment of faculty to write poems which have been so often parodied but are yet unspoiled, and, used in the common

utterance of two generations, are still as fresh as ever.

But the highest and most enduring fame of Longfellow must be based upon the calm and happy trust, the noble moral influence of his writings. Before his poetic career commenced he said in his prose poem, "Hyperion," that the surest blessedness was to do the thing that most wanted doing without a thought of fame, and he has assured us, in his poem on the despoiled ambitions of Belisarius, that

"The plaudits of the crowd
Are but the clatter of feet
At midnight in the street,
Hollow and restless and loud."

We can easily conceive that he has not worked for fame; but if fame be ever worth the having, and if it can ever fill the heart with a genuine and pure delight, surely it must be the fame that is won by the exercise of rare gifts for the moral elevation and benefit of mankind. Such a fame is Longfellow's. He has set to all succeeding poets the noble example of great gifts employed for great uses, and has left behind him no soiled or evil page.

GEORGE ELIOT.

THE traveler who stands at the very foot of a mountain is never conscious of its vastness. It is only as he leaves it behind him that its true proportions reveal themselves. Then, as he journeys far and farther from its base, for the first time he realizes the grandeur and sublimity of those summits which were concealed from him when he stood beneath the very shadow of their walls. With every step he takes, bigger and bluer swims up into the sky the mountain's crest, changing with the shifting light and growing distance, frowning under the shadow of the thunder-cloud, or softened in the evening stillness. It is even so that the great presences of humanity impress their personality upon the ages. They are rarely measured rightly by their immediate contemporaries, and one might add by their earliest biographers. Boswells are few, and the Boswell instinct is almost unique. Forster can only give us a Forsterized Dickens, and suggest ingenious doubts as to whether

he or Dickens really wrote *Dombey* and *David Copperfield*. Froude certainly gives us Carlyle, "warts and all;" but the picture lacks balance and proportion, and the warts are seen through the magnifying-glass of an ultra-honesty which very much resembles malice. Mr. Cross gives us a bundle of letters and leaves George Eliot still a shadow and a name. It is charitable to assume that he has lived beneath her influence too completely to realize her greatness, and perhaps the same assumption may be true of the entire age in which her life was lived. We have not yet left the mountain far enough behind to realize its grandeur. But if we do not realize the grandeur we at least admit it; and how great was the place George Eliot filled in modern literature we may measure by the impossibility of naming her successor.

The outline of George Eliot's early life is tolerably familiar to the public, and very great interest attaches to it. Her father was a remarkable man, of great natural shrewdness, individuality, and force of character. He was the son of a village carpenter, and many traits of his character are embodied in Adam Bede and Caleb Garth. His indomitable will. not

less than his business talents, raised him to the position of land agent to Sir Roger Newdigate, and throughout the part of Warwickshire where he resided he was revered as a man of sterling and invincible uprightness. Adam Bede hated to see men drop their work the moment the clock sounded, as though they grudged an extra moment in their master's service; and the same proud and generous spirit animated Robert Evans. He was incapable of meanness and inflexible in duty. Yet in the granite of that strong nature, as is common in men noted for their usual sternness, many a gentle rill of tenderness welled up. He was forty-six when Marian was born, and "the little wench" was very precious to her father. Her mother is said to have had a touch of Mrs. Poyser in her—a woman of fine administrative ability in the household, with a faculty of incisive speech naturally running into epigram and wit, and not seldom; probably, lacerating softer natures with its sharp criticisms. And there were uncles and aunts of the Glegg and Pullet type, who no doubt thought the dreamy child a very "strange little gell," and made her fly with all the keener love to the refuge of the

strong father's affection. A very charming picture is given us of Mr. Robert Evans driving round the country-side with "the little gell" between his knees, the said little gell silently absorbing many a glimpse of landscape, or old gabled farm-house, and many a turn of humorous speech, which were all to swim up to the surface again in after years and be woven into the texture of her books. The most painful episode of the book is that which relates to the division which occurred in after-life between father and daughter on the subject of their theological views, the widowed father making up his mind to live alone rather than with a daughter who refused to go to church, and she for a time preferring the prospect of school-drudgery to submission. But the threatened separation never happened. The picture that glows before us in these early pages is of quiet home at Griff, a charming red brick, ivy-covered house on the Arbury estate—"the warm little nest where her affections were fledged." There George Eliot spent the first twenty-one years of her life.

An excellent passage in Mr. Cross's introduction puts before us vividly enough the

condition of the times in 1819, when Marian Evans was born, and reminds us how far we have moved :

“ That Greater Britain (Canada and Australia) which to-day forms so large a reading public was then scarcely more than a geographical expression, with less than half a million of inhabitants, all told, where at present there are eight millions; and in the United States—where more copies of George Eliot’s works are now sold than in any other quarter of the world—the population then numbered less than ten millions, where to-day it is fifty-five millions. Including Great Britain, these English-speaking races have increased from thirty millions in 1820 to one hundred millions in 1884; and with the corresponding increase in education we can form some conception how a popular English writer’s fame has widened its circle.”

As Mr. Cross justly observes, much of the quality of George Eliot’s writing is due to the character of the times in which her youth was lived. In 1819 the wheels of life ran slowly along ruts of sweet, old-fashioned leisure, and had not begun to break into flame with the

speed of modern energy. There was leisure to grow wise and shelter to grow ripe. The imagination had time to absorb its materials, and a large nature had space and peace in which to develop its powers. "Her roots were down in the pre-railroad, pre-telegraphic period, and her genius was the outcome of these conditions. Perhaps that is saying too much, but it certainly indicates an important truth. If solitude is necessary to the ease and tranquil strength, occasionally rising into majesty, and never destitute of force, which are the distinguishing qualities of George Eliot's style, it is easy to imagine how well such a style could grow in the remote serenity of a country house half a century ago, and how much more difficult it would be for any such style to take root and thrive amid the conditions of to-day life.

Nothing which George Eliot has written is so full of profound interest as the record of her own early life. That life has, indeed, been more than indicated in her own Maggie Tulliver. When she drew the picture of Maggie, with her pride and her affection, the one leading her into perpetual revolt, the other bring-

ing her back again humble and penitent, subdued by the imperious need of being loved; when she painted the gradual waking of the spiritual nature in Maggie, the desire for self-sacrifice in perpetual conflict with the needs and yearnings of a sensuous nature, the reverence for duty, the clear perception that whatever failed that must be clung to, as with a death-grip—in all this we have much of her own spiritual portraiture. The young girl who stands in the window of the old mill, absorbed in her first glimpse of Thomas à Kempis, thrilled with a strange awe, as if “wakened in the night with a strain of solemn music,” while the songs of that far-off voice echo for the first time through her soul, saying, “For-sake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy much inward peace; then shall all vain imaginations, evil perturbations, and superfluous cares fly away; then shall immoderate fear leave thee, and inordinate love shall die”—this is Marian Evans at eighteen in the red brick house at Griff. She, too, heard that low penetrating music which has pierced and soothed so many wayward hearts through the long centuries, and drank it in as a draught of

life from the wells of God. Like Maggie, she read on and on in the old book, devouring eagerly the dialogues of the invisible Teacher, the pattern of sorrow, the source of all strength—with all the hurry of an imagination that could never rest in the present; and in the ardor of first discovery renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving for in vain.

George Eliot never wrote a passage pervaded by more tender feeling than this passage describing how Maggie Tulliver, amid the miseries of her young life, first saw that heavenly vision of peace won out of sorrow and secret joy, kindled in spite of outward conditions of distress. As we read these early letters we can understand the spiritual emotion, the pathos and power, of this passage; it was drawn straight from the deeps of the writer's own most sacred experience. In that moment of spiritual revelation to George Eliot, as to many another, the secret of life seemed solved. She was swept by a strong tide, stronger than she knew, far away from her former conceptions of life, and in the delicious sense of surrender and renunciation never paused to ask whether

she had not surrendered too much, whether such a tide might not ebb, whether such self-sacrifice as Thomas à Kempis taught might not be in fact self-effacement, and produce at last as strong a recoil in the repressed individuality.

In those days Marian Evans highly enjoyed Hannah More's letters, and found the "contemplation of so blessed a character as hers very salutary." She who in after years was to write that bitterly brilliant essay on "Other Worldliness," in which the works of Young are so mercilessly satirized, at eighteen is in love with his genius and strongly commends certain passages of his writings to her friends. There is a touch of asceticism in her thought which leads her to look upon marriage as an institution tending to dull the heavenly flame; and she "can only sigh for those who are multiplying earthly ties which, though powerful enough to detach their hearts and thoughts from heaven, are so brittle as to be liable to be snapped asunder at every breeze." Almost everywhere in these early letters such sentences as these may be culled: "O, that we could live for eternity! that we could realize

its nearness! May the Lord give me such an insight into what is truly good that I may not rest content with making Christianity a mere addendum to my pursuits, or with tacking it as a fringe on my garments! May I seek to be sanctified wholly!" To her aunt, Mrs. Samuel Evans—out of whose spiritual experience and work as a Wesleyan preacher she fashioned her Dinah Morris—she deplores her "lack of humility and Christian simplicity, which makes me willing to obtain credit for greater knowledge and deeper feeling than I really possess."

Novels she has little taste for, and considers hurtful, and says: "Religious novels are more hateful to me than merely worldly ones; they are a sort of centaur or mermaid, and, like other monsters that we do not know how to class, should be destroyed for the public good as soon as born. The weapons of the Christian warfare were never sharpened at the forge of romance." She complains that the Oxford Tracts contain "a very confused and unscriptural statement of the great doctrine of justification," and "a disposition to fraternize with the mystery of iniquity." Her first production ever clothed with the glory of

print is a poem on the death of St. Peter, which appeared in the *Christian Observer* for January, 1840, with an editorial note explaining that "M. A. E." is quite wrong in supposing that the Bible will be read in heaven. And in a letter written in her eighteenth year we have the germ of that tendency which in after-life led her to choose as her heroes and heroines common people, living homely lives and contending with the sordid troubles of an insignificant existence, and which led her to lay such eloquent stress upon the tragedy and passion which dwell in what we are pleased to call "common life." "I verily believe," she writes to Miss Lewis, "that in most cases it requires more of a martyr's spirit to endure with patience and cheerfulness daily crossings and interruptions of our petty desires and pursuits, and to rejoice in them, if they can be made to conduce to God's glory and our own sanctification, than even to lay down our lives for the truth." This is not merely a beautiful truth expressed with all the force and finish of George Eliot's maturest style, but is indicative of the tone of mind with which she habitually regarded human life, and which made farm

kitchens and carpenters' shops sufficient theaters for the noblest creations of her genius to act out their simple heroisms or bitter tragedies.

In 1841 that acquaintance with the Brays of Coventry commenced which had such an important effect on George Eliot's subsequent life. Mr. Bray had married a Miss Hennell, and her brother Charles had published a book entitled *An Inquiry into the Origin of Christianity*, which, in some important respects, anticipated the rationalistic criticism and method of Strauss. The perusal of this book had a great effect on her mind, and completely altered her views of the Christian religion. It directly led to her subsequent translation of Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, which was her first piece of real literary work. But nothing is more remarkable in these letters and the record of her entire life than the abundant evidence we have that, whatever she ignored in Christian truth, religious feeling never ceased to animate her. While translating the work of Strauss she had an ivory crucifix hung over her desk; and to Miss Hennell she confesses "she is Strauss-sick; it makes her ill, dissecting the

beautiful story of the crucifixion, and only the sight of the Christ-image and picture make her endure it." She writes thus of the journey to Emmaus:

"That most beautiful passage in Luke's gospel! How universal is its significance! The soul that has hopelessly followed its Jesus—its impersonation of the highest and best—all in despondency: its thoughts all refuted, its dreams all dissipated! Then comes another Jesus—another, but the same—the same highest best, only chastened—crucified instead of triumphant; and the soul learns that this is the true way to conquest and glory. And then there is the burning of the heart, which assures that this was the Lord—that this is the inspiration from above, the true Comforter that leads into truth. But I am not a Methodist."

No, she was "not a Methodist;" but she had drunk so deeply of the wells of early Methodist theology that not even Strauss could prevent this outburst of emotion, this tender, suppressed yearning of the lonely heart for some more personal comforter than the "highest best" of Positivism. It is a curious spectacle, no doubt, the heart-sick translator of Strauss

only nerved to her work by the suspended crucifix, with its tokens of triumphant sorrow. We could more readily have understood the symbol of that divine anguish arresting the hand that was slowly reducing its reality to a fable. But we must remember that in George Eliot we have to do with a nature wonderfully complex and intricate; a masculine intellect allied to more than usually sensitive emotions; a mind capable of the severest study, the subtlest strategies of thought, held in check by all the clinging tenderness of a nature capable of passionate attachments and perpetually yearning for some responding love on which it could repose—some object on which it might lavish the wealth of its affections.

It is absolutely necessary to bear this in mind if we are to hold any clew at all to the nature of George Eliot and the motives of her life. No one can read her letters without remarking on the facility with which she took up new friendships and the almost girlish effusiveness which characterizes her letters, even when she was in the last stage of life, to her recent as well as her old friends. That hunger for love which led Maggie Tulliver into so many errors

was precisely the master-passion in the heart of her creator ; but while in George Eliot's case the crowning mistake which Maggie nobly fought down was actually committed, yet, by virtue of that very tenderness, neither Strauss, nor Frederick Harrison, nor G. H. Lewes, nor any other creature could wholly close the door of her heart against the exiled Christ of the intellect. The woman who pictured Dinah Morris preaching on the village green and praying with the penitent Hetty Sorrel in prison ; who, in the highest hour of her destiny, makes Maggie Tulliver, amid the fierce stress of mortal anguish, turn from the golden future to the hard, bleak waste of life-long renunciation, crying, " There are memories and affections and longings after a perfect goodness that have such a strong hold on me I couldn't live at peace if I put the shadow of a willful sin between myself and God ; " who in her greatest story makes the modern world thrill again before the spiritual force and intensity of Savonarola, as once all Florence thrilled and trembled when the thunder of his voice pealed through the Duomo—this woman had tasted the mysteries of a religious experience

foreign enough to the shallow amiability and self-complacency of such a nature as that of Mr. George Henry Lewes. She was "not a Methodist;" but like many other persons who would disclaim the title both her life and her art owed more than she supposed to those religious influences which molded her in early days.

In any attempt to fix the place of George Eliot among English writers it will be necessary to lay stress upon this strange union in her of what are often opposites. Every page of her life gives evidence of the intensity of her emotions, the space and energy of her intellect, and the strength of her religious feeling. Much might be written upon the enormous capacity for work which she possessed, her splendid grasp of abstruse sciences, her use of scientific illustrations in her prose and poetry, the delicacy, subtlety, and acumen of her mind; and these are the more remarkable not merely because they existed in a woman with more than ordinary susceptibility of nature and more than common tenderness of affection, but because they were found in a woman who had built up her culture in lonely isolation

from great centers of thought, and amid distressing physical conditions which made it often true that her address was, "Grief Castle, on the River of Gloom, in the Valley of Dolor." The unique position George Eliot holds in English literature is due to this combination of gifts, and is at once indicated by comparison. Take the three greatest names in modern fiction—Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray—and compare with them and their works George Eliot and hers. In Scott is broad health and freedom, breadth of sky, clearness of atmosphere, not less in the outlook and character of his own mind than in his presentation of artistic effects; but nowhere does he show himself penetrated by any sense of the mystery and complexity of life. He writes with the good-natured ease of a man blessed with an excellent digestion and familiar with broad moors and sweet country air; who, in his own life, has never sounded the deeper notes of tragedy and never known the bitter throes of anguish. Dickens is always a boy in his humor, and exaggerates his tragedy, as a man would who relies for his materials on imagination rather than experience; and, moreover, he seldom

gives us any sense of intellectual resource. Thackeray, perhaps, impresses us with the greatest sense of intellectual powers; and in his best and most serious writing is most penetrated by religious feeling. Each is great in his sphere, and a more or less interesting personality.

But George Eliot is much more. She is a great thinker and a great scholar who chooses to write tales, but who might as readily have written histories and philosophies. It is characteristic that she was thirty-seven before she attempted fiction, and then—in spite of Mr. Lewes's opinion that she lacked imagination and dramatic power—with such success as to place her instantly in the rank of great masters. Her popularity only deepened in her mind her sense of responsibility, a sense which latterly became a burden very heavy to be borne, for she never regarded herself in any other light than that of a teacher. She brought to the novelist's art wide scholarship, splendid intellect, and profound experience, and held it in trust as a ministry. One fails anywhere to discern personal vanity in her in relation to her own works; every-where one does discern this

intense sense of responsibility. The result is that she is so much more than a novelist that occasionally she is less than one; the burden of her teaching is too great for the resources of her romance, and it is the voice of the prophet which is sometimes heard instead of the cunning music of the story-teller. But another consequence is that her fiction is wrought with a majesty and power which give it a category of its own and secure for it a noble place in English literature. It is superb fiction; but it is much more than fiction.

George Eliot seldom spoke of her own works even to intimate friends, but in the last year of her life she once asked Mr. Cross a question concerning their general effect upon his mind, which led him to reply that he felt the general effect to be profoundly sad. She was grieved and disappointed with the answer. In spite of endless physical depressions she herself possessed an indomitable cheerfulness, and she naturally supposed she had communicated some portion of that cheerfulness to her writings. Yet unquestionably Mr. Cross was right. The dominant chord, sometimes almost lulled into a distant murmur but never silent.

and continually swelling up into tragic passion and pain, is sadness. Her humor passes like a ripple of swift sunshine or laughter, but the old gray sky closes up again and the smothered wail of pain makes itself heard. The central point of her philosophy is that there is a continuity in actions which cannot be broken, and that nothing but an inflexible regard for duty and a perpetual willingness to sacrifice our own happiness to supreme moral purposes, or the happiness of others, can save the individual life from shipwreck or mutilation. She never shows us good springing out of evil; mere optimistic folk may teach that comforting doctrine; but she walks in the light of common day and in the presence of the unvarnished realities of life, and prefers to enforce the more terrible truth that evil springs out of evil, and can produce nothing but evil. There are no arresting angels in the path; healing and comforting angels there may be, but the bitter consequences of wrong-doing must be paid to the uttermost farthing notwithstanding. With an almost cruel insistency, or an insistency which would be cruel but for the sympathy and pity of the writer, she follows the clew of

the first evil step in its unwinding, and forces us to admit the inevitable recompense, the irreparable pain. Every book she has written is charged with this stern truth, and its plot ultimately reaches this *dénouement*. Hetty Sorrel's vanity and shallowness, her disregard for those homely traditions which have their roots in the dim past and make a code of duty for homely people, with all the hard selfishness which lay under that pretty childishness, work out inevitably the tragedy of her life, and are in fact the very elements out of which that tragedy springs. Godfrey Cass's first error, in concealing what he ought to have confessed, brings a whole string of errors with it, stretching over a life-time, until, after twenty years, the bitter revelation has to be made, and the cry is wrung from him: "There's debts we can't pay like money debts, by paying extra for the years that have slipped by. Marner was right in what he said about a man turning away a blessing from his door; it falls to somebody else. I wanted to pass for childless once; I shall pass for childless now against my wish."

But it is in Romola and in the character of Tito Melema that this lesson is driven home

with the most merciless force. The smooth young Greek, with his beautiful face and happy smile—who could think of him as Judas? Yet perchance Judas

“ Had eyes of starry blue,
And lips like thine, that gave the traitor-kiss.”

It is one of the minor lessons George Eliot is fond of teaching, that faces can be masks as well as mirrors; it is the heart and not the face that makes the traitor. Tito shrinks from inflicting pain as from suffering it; he wishes to be happy himself, and has the most benevolent desires for the happiness of the whole human race. But he is thoroughly resolved to be happy at all costs; and while he deplores the necessity of making the anguish of others part of that cost, yet he accepts the necessity. It is unpleasant; he would much rather have gained his base Paradise without injury to any body; but he is quietly resolved not to forego it on that account. From the moment he refuses his first obvious duty of rescuing the old scholar who had lived for him the wrong step is taken which leads onward through an increasing maze of difficulties. As a direct consequence of his first prevarication he finds

himself under the unpleasant necessity of denouncing his foster-father as a madman, of sending him in chains to prison, and, by another series of events springing from the first, of becoming a traitor to his wife and the betrayer of his party. There is no more profoundly subtle portrait in English literature than Tito's; and its artistic truth is as absolute as the technical skill with which it is perfected. Its moral power is even more wonderful. To the last Tito has never succeeded in becoming a hardened and thorough-paced villain; the ill he does is repugnant to him, and he would much rather not have done it. But his only guide is desire, and his only principle of action present ease and pleasure. And he forgets, or has never recognized, that grim, indefeasible truth which George Eliot makes the soul of her teaching in this as in so many books: "Our deeds are like children that are born to us; they live and act apart from our will. Nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never; they have an indestructible life both in and out of our consciousness."

For this moral teaching the world owes a great debt of gratitude to George Eliot. But

it was inevitable that a series of books all more or less permeated with such teaching, all striking this deep chord of the irreparable, all omitting, or else including but faint, far-off snatches of that sweeter music of a divine hope, a divine restoration, should be profoundly sad. Even the humor of George Eliot is tinged with this sadness; it is bitter-sweet, and is akin to pity. It springs from the active contact of a high and broad mind with narrow and confined intelligences, reading their dim thoughts by a wider light and measuring their homely ways by a larger standard. If Dickens had painted the Gleggs and the Pullets we should have felt that he himself enjoyed the fun he made, and we should have caught our contagion of laughter straight from his own lips. But George Eliot's humor is a boomerang; it makes the circle of laughter and ends in pity. We feel that she is not really laughing herself at all. She is thinking how sad a sight it is to look upon people imprisoned in such small traditions and unable to perceive the larger life that throbs around them; and while she cannot help describing the "ways of the Dodson family" with evi-

dent relish she is full of gentle pity and regret. She herself was, probably, quite unconscious that this understrain of deep feeling made itself felt through her humor, and hence her disappointment when more than one intimate friend confessed to the realization of this sense of general sadness produced by her works. But it is an unquestioned element, and it may, perhaps, be said that no writer who has done so much to move our laughter has written so much to make us sad.

And though it is not a pleasant thing to say, yet it must be confessed that we rise from the perusal of this life with the consciousness that the somberness was in the life itself, and in the result of a wrong step which casts its shadow to the end. At the most crucial point of her own career George Eliot did what the whole bulk of her teaching condemns with such majestic sternness: she forgot the inexorable regard for duty, the imperious necessity of purchasing no personal joy by the grief of others or her own errors; the clear need of sacrificing personal joy to the wise traditions of universal law and order which that teaching every-where enforces as the first condition of a truly noble life.

It has been said that from that wrong step sprang the real development of her life, and that by it was wrought the new intellectual force which gave the world her novels. But there is no evidence of this, and we think George Eliot herself would have been the first to resent such an inference with scorn. She would have said that better no such books were written than written at the price of wrong, and we can readily imagine with what force and eloquence of noble sentiment she would have treated such a position had it found a place in her fiction. As it was she did say, through the lips of Maggie Tulliver, "Many things are difficult and dark to me; but I can see one thing quite clearly, that I must not, cannot seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. Love is natural; but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too. And they would live in me still, and punish me if I did not obey them. I should be haunted by the suffering I had caused. Faithfulness and constancy mean something else besides doing what is easiest and pleasantest to ourselves. They mean renouncing whatever is opposed to the reliance others have in

us—whatever would cause misery to those whom the course of our lives has made dependent on us.” Is it too much to suppose that here it is George Eliot herself who speaks—that in spite of all intellectual sophistries with which she might impose upon the moral sense, that sensitive and noble nature, that delicate and shrinking womanliness felt the sting, and was indeed haunted by the suffering one wrong step had caused? It is true there is no evidence of any remorse in her published letters, but there is abundant evidence in her stories. The constant reiteration of one painful theme is proof of how large a place it filled in her own experience. Whenever she approaches it her tone deepens into solemnity, and her message is delivered with intense, even anguished moral earnestness. No writer of fiction has treated the temptations of passion with a nobler moral force or insight, and none has dwelt upon them more persistently. But this very fact is in itself an indication of that concealed suffering which confesses itself by sympathy with the suffering of others, and it is impossible to dissociate the sadness of George Eliot’s books from the error of her life.

The whole life of George Eliot was pervaded by her intellectual energy and devoted to incessant intellectual toil. She said she began "*Romola*" a young woman, and it left her an old one. She spared no effort to make her work complete; and her sense of responsibility to the public, after their first recognition of her great powers, led her to cultivate those powers to the utmost for the public service. The very completeness of that culture reacted disastrously upon her later novels; but just as it has been said no other poet but Milton could have moved under the immense weight of classical learning contained in the "*Paradise Lost*," so it may be asserted any other novelist than George Eliot would have been stifled under the trappings of so encyclopedic a culture as hers. Her physical sufferings were not less than Carlyle's, but her views of life were never jaundiced by them, nor her tongue envenomed. There is a dignity about her last days which reminds us of the last days of Milton. Like Milton, she always began her day with some chapters from the Bible, and particularly delighted in reading aloud the finer passages of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and St. Paul. Her voice had

“organ-like tones” in it, and when she read the Bible, and the elder English poets, its deep sadness added greatly to the solemnity and majesty of the rhythm. In Shakespeare and Milton, and latterly in Wordsworth, she found constant companionship; and four lines from the “Samson Agonistes” she was accustomed to repeat with a fullness of effect not to be forgotten:

“But what more oft, in nations grown corrupt,
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty,
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty?”

She keenly watched the social life of her time, and with all its intellectual movements she was intimately acquainted. In her the thirst for knowledge was never slaked, and the ardor of the intellect never dimmed. To the last no shadow fell across that spacious mind; no faculty lost its edge, no function of thought gave intimation of decay. There was no darkening of the stage before the curtain fell—it fell silently and swiftly upon a brilliant intellect at the very culmination of its powers. At her death there was found within reach of the lifeless hand one pathetic memorial of the

past, which neither change of creed nor state could exile; it had accompanied her through all the strange ways which lay between the obscure girl-life at Griff and the famous years of mature womanhood in London—it was a well-worn copy of Thomas à Kempis.

GEORGE MEREDITH:

HIS METHOD AND HIS TEACHING.

I READ the other day, in an article which professed to be critical, the somewhat remarkable statement that there were at least fifty novelists who could have written *Oliver Twist* better than Dickens wrote it. I was sincerely glad to hear it, for I had no notion that English fiction was so liberally endowed in these latter days, and I wish I could believe it. As a matter of fact, unfortunately, every one who knows any thing will know that this statement is ludicrously false, and he will know how it came to be made. It is the result of the new method of criticism, which writes its "appreciations" or "depreciations" at random, and bases its judgments entirely on the comparison of things between which there is no likeness, and therefore ought to be no comparison. Criticism without comparison is impossible, but under such a system it becomes necessary to depreciate one author in

order to "appreciate" another, and the main result is wholesale confusion of thought and utter blindness of judgment.

Now, Mr. Meredith is at the present moment in great peril from this species of writing. There is a Meredith-cult in progress, and every one who loves literature will rejoice that this is so in so far as it means that after thirty years of scandalous neglect the public has at last discovered that there is a writer of first-rate genius in its midst. But is it really necessary to sneer at Dickens and disparage Thackeray and George Eliot in order to convince us of the excellence of George Meredith? Why make comparisons which bring no light, but rather make confusion worse confounded, which not only do not help us toward a true interpretation of Meredith, but destroy the very means by which any true interpretation becomes possible? It is perfectly true that Dickens could not have written the *Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, but it is equally true that Meredith could not have written *Oliver Twist*; and again it is true that each is a work of genius. The fifty gentlemen who could have written *Oliver Twist* are of strangely retiring

and modest disposition, for up to the present moment we have had no sign of the presence of any one of them. When any one of them has written a half-dozen pages as deeply tragic as the murder of Nancy and the death of Bill Sikes we shall hear of him without fail; and if we have not heard of him it is surely because he has not yet accomplished that remarkable feat. No; we shall not arrive at the truth about any body by simply disparaging his neighbors. George Meredith must be taken upon his own merits, and in no possible case that might be suggested is the comparative method of criticism more futile. He stands by himself, a strong and lonely figure, on a coign of vantage all his own, unaccompanied and unclassed, impressive by his very loneliness not less than by his strength, a man supremely indifferent to the world and its cackle of praise or disparagement, who from the first has waited for the world to come up to him, and has never sought to descend to the world. He has the majestic isolation of the mountain peak that does not appear to belong to any range, a Matterhorn, sharply divided from its fellows, serrated and solitary, rejoicing in its

own splendors of dawn and sunset, starry eminence and glory, while other peaks share a common day and night. If such a man is to be understood it can only be by patient study of his style and teaching, and this can only be undertaken and accomplished by free minds—by minds that are open to receive new impressions without prejudice and to register them without reference to older standards.

Having said so much it is natural to ask, How is it that it has taken so long for George Meredith to become known? Matterhorns cannot very well be hid. Why have so few persons noticed such a presence in so long a period as thirty years? If we take the date of his first book, the *Poems of 1851*, the period is really forty years; but it is sufficient for our purpose to take the date of his first great novel, *Richard Feverel*, which appeared in 1859. Since that date he has published nine complete novels, besides various short tales and poems. How is it that they have made comparatively so little impression on the public mind? To revert to my image for a moment, I may reply that it by no means follows that because there is a Matterhorn every one will know it. Great

peaks, like all other great things, after all, have to be discovered, and for centuries travelers may pass the mouth of some valley which holds a Matterhorn without any impulse to penetrate its solitude or any notion that it is the pathway to a splendor. It counts for little, as a detraction from genius, that men have had to wait long for recognition. In our own generation Wordsworth and Browning wrote for thirty years without earning enough money to buy them porridge, and Carlyle was on the very brink of ruin before the tide turned. But perhaps these names in themselves are sufficient to explain the phenomenon. Each brought something new for which the world was unprepared, a new teaching and a new style. When this happens the only consolation of the author is to reflect that his writing

“Is not meat
For little people and for fools,”

and to await with patience the hour when those who are wiser, the true “aristocracy,” will recognize the truth, and force its recognition upon the dull mind of the world.

The delay of recognition with George Mer-

edith is due first to the novelty of his style. It is brilliant beyond example, but at times obscure in almost equal degree. It is, however, far oftener brilliant than obscure. To those who love splendor, subtlety, and felicity of diction, combined with the most penetrating and suggestive thought, the writing of George Meredith is an unboundaried paradise. Roam where you will, a profusion of things dear to the delicate and discerning palate are found. Or, to change the figure, never was there so coruscating a style. The page perpetually breaks in star-sparkles ; it flashes with all sorts of pyrotechnic displays, it is volcanic with eruptive radiance. Sometimes it is almost mischievously coruscating, as though a boy exploded crackers under you for the mere pleasure of seeing you jump. But one never knows how soon or suddenly the fire may go out, and you may find yourself plunged into the darkest by-ways of obscurity. Mr. Meredith has described Carlyle's style, and in doing so has partially described his own :

“A style resembling either early architecture or utter dilapidation, so loose and rough it seemed ; a wind-in-the-orchard style, that tum-

bled down here and there an appreciable fruit with uncouth bluster ; sentences without commencements running to abrupt endings and smoke, like waves against a sea-wall, learned dictionaries giving a hand to street-slang, and accents falling on them haphazard, like slant rays from driving clouds ; all the pages in a breeze, the whole book producing a sort of electrical agitation in the mind and joints."

Neither of Carlyle nor Meredith is this description wholly true ; but, as Carlyle might have said, " it is significant of much " in both. To complain of too great brilliance is, no doubt, a novel complaint, yet in Mr. Meredith's case it is a very real one. Conceive a concert wherein all the music is *allegro*, or a gallery entirely full of Turner's most gorgeous sunsets, and you have a not inapt illustration of the effect produced by a continuous reading of George Meredith. The most brilliant thing suffers by a want of contrast. The last marvelous movement in a great sonata is all the more striking by contrast with that which has preceded it ; the finest Turner is yet finer if we see it after having seen some study of soft and tender grays. We miss the point of rest

almost altogether in Mr. Meredith's work. He is so infinitely vivacious, versatile, and witty, so fertile in jest and epigram, so agile in the leaps and glances of his thought, so wayward and surprising, so conspicuously acute and clever, that less nimble minds pant breathless behind him, and even the nimblest have a difficulty in keeping pace with him. "She ran ahead of his thoughts like nimble fire," he says in one place of Mrs. Caroline Grandison. It is a just description of his own treatment of his readers; and sometimes the fire we have followed with panting eagerness suddenly dances a will-o'-the-wisp fantasy of mirth and leaves us knee-deep in the bog. When once we become used to his method no writer can afford so much intellectual exhilaration; but it is little wonder, when we consider it, that the regular novel-reader is bewildered by so uncommon a guide and prefers some one much duller and safer. Intellectual gymnastics, however brilliant, are not what that patient and somewhat dull creature, "the general reader," looks for in a novel.

It is altogether too late to enter upon the question so often raised in connection with

Mr. Meredith's work, whether science ought to find place in novels ; the question is rather how large a space ought science to occupy. If this is a scientific age, and if the novel holds the mirror up to the age, science must needs be adequately reflected in it. Moreover, as one of Mr. Meredith's critics has truly said, the way of advance in English fiction lies through George Eliot and George Meredith—that is, through the only two novelists of our time who have come to their task with a complete scientific equipment. Is their work the better or worse for this equipment ? It may be answered that it is both. After all, the novel is not a psychological, and still less a physiological, treatise, and there are moments in the writing of both George Eliot and George Meredith when it becomes this and nothing more. The more a novelist knows the better will he write ; but when he pauses in his story to display his knowledge he becomes a pedant and ceases to be a novelist. The worst fault of Browning also lies in this ; there are times when his poetry runs into pedantry, and the reader of the "Paradise Lost" will note the same tendency in Milton. But it is possible.

and it is common, to exaggerate these blemishes, and people who do not care to be at any trouble in their reading triumphantly push these blemishes forward as an excuse for their intellectual indolence. To such people, I suppose, poetry and fiction are simply ingenious relaxations for the idle moments of life, of which they have too many, and they naturally demand the old commonplaces of pursuing love and ultimate marriage-bells as the beginning and end of fiction, and resent a style of fiction which is charged with the gravest matter and is meant to make men think. Toward such readers George Meredith, and not less George Eliot and Browning, take up an attitude of irreconcilable defiance. They do so because they regard their art as a serious business. They are of Milton's temper, and approach their task with a solemn invocation that what is dark in them may be illumined, what is weak strengthened, that they may rise to the height of their great argument. A sacred fire burns in them, for they are prophets, not hirelings; voices, not echoes; artists, not artificers. Milton, George Eliot, and Browning have already triumphed and compelled the

world to listen ; will not George Meredith also triumph in due season ?

I have stated the defects of George Meredith, but I am bound to add that they are the defects of great qualities, and that they have been greatly exaggerated by people incapable of recognizing the qualities. If I am sometimes wearied with the constant dazzle of the style, on the whole I am only too glad to find a style that is capable of dazzling, and I may add that I am seldom wearied. If I mention its occasional obscurity, I emphasize the fact that the obscurity is only occasional, and that as a rule the style is absolutely lucid. Nothing can be more unjust than to say that George Meredith cannot tell a story or that his style is consistently obscure. The bulk of his stories are admirably conceived and executed, and for the most part the style is marvelous in its suppleness, its unflagging force and grace, its subtlety of flavor and suggestion, its flashes of inspiration, its intense concision, its actual splendor and poetry of phrase, its searching directness and nervous strength. He is a prose Browning, and his phrases are even more haunting than Browning's. He is the comrade and suc-

cessor of George Eliot, but is George Eliot's master both in force of intellect and poetic magnificence of diction.

Why, then, we ask again, has it taken thirty years for Mr. Meredith to be known, and even now not widely known? The real reason lies in the fact that he was not the universal note of the great popular writers.

Dickens, in his best work, and in spite of much that was tawdry, had that note; and George Eliot, also, in spite of much that was stiff and scholastic, at least in her earlier volumes. *David Copperfield* has a charm for the least and most cultured, and so has *Adam Bede*. The shopman and the student alike read them, and each feels the charm, though it may be through widely differing channels. But great as are *The Ordcal of Richard Feverel* and *The Egoist*, they are not conceived on that broadly human scale which is bound to draw all eyes, to move all hearts. They have height rather than breadth, a quality that is Miltonic rather than Shakespearean. They appeal irresistibly to the cultured, but scarcely at all to the crowd. Style, whether too brilliant or too obscure, science, whether too obtrusively or

too frequently thrust to the front, would not be sufficient barriers to dismay the mass of readers if the story itself struck the universal note and appealed to the deep heart of humanity.

To recur again to a name which is inseparable from Meredith's, we may say that he and Browning stand in the same category. It is impossible to suppose that either can be widely read. Browning is not a people's poet, nor is Meredith a people's novelist. But in spite of this Browning, in his teaching and his influence, stands at the back of all the most influential teachers of our day, and is daily being re-interpreted by a thousand lips to ten thousands of persons who are ignorant of his poetry. In the same way Meredith is a fruitful force, working not directly but indirectly on the mass of readers, not in his own person so much as in a far wider degree through the persons of others who have received the impact of his teaching. It is perhaps not as we could wish it, and not as he could wish it. But if it be for the present a thing inevitable there is this compensation, that as the race progresses he will become more and more visible in the

general life, and may be read together with Browning by new generations, when those who had their reward in this life are utterly forgotten.

The two great weapons in which Meredith excels are satire and humor. The satire is never less than excellent, for in the mere literary finish of his biting epigrams he is unsurpassed by any writer of English, either past or present. The fault of the satire is that it is not kindly, and it can be cruel. It is as keen as a surgeon's knife, and as cold. It lays bare all the hidden disease of the human soul, and cuts relentlessly, almost savagely, through the intervening filaments. Not in all literature is there to be found so terrible an exposition of selfishness as in the character of Sir Willoughby Patterne, the Egoist. If it were possible to light up a human body from the inside, so that it should become transparent to us, like a glass bee-hive, in which we see every movement of busy wing or tentacle, so that in like manner we might discern every little beating nerve of man, every throb and palpitation of remotest vein and artery, it would be an apt figure of how Meredith treats the soul of man. He

conceals nothing ; he concedes nothing ; he simply flashes his terrible search-light into the secret places of the heart, and things explain themselves. Coiling one inside the other, restless with vehement and loathsome vitality, we see the mass of serpentine motives, the mean and wicked impulses, which lurk in the bottom of the human ego. Pleasant?—no, it is not pleasant ; but how true it is ! How wholesome it is for us to be driven sometimes into this searching analysis of ourselves ! We pause a hundred times in the reading of the *Egoist* and shudder, for we have found out something about ourselves which we did not suspect, or of which we were fearfully and faintly conscious, as of a skeleton in the cupboard, known to us, but judiciously and gratefully ignored. Mr. Meredith refuses to be our accomplice in any such deception. He forces us to face the ghastly secret of the human cupboard. “Sacred reality,” he tells us, is the goddess he worships ; and he argues that it cannot be wise or right for any of us to go about in ignorance of what we really are. His satire is the child of relentless truth ; it is indeed truth itself, naked, severe, uncompromising. When we close the *Egoist*

we feel as if we have already stood before the judgment-seat of God.

No more striking example of this rigid satirical analysis is to be found than in Mr. Meredith's exposure of what Sir Willoughby's desire for purity in woman really means. He demands of his betrothed that she should be cloistral. "Women of mixed essences, shading off the divine to the considerably lower, were outside his vision of women." He demands "purity infinite, spotless bloom." The commonplace observer will at once say, Of how admirable and clean a nature must be this man who can be content with nothing less than "purity infinite" in woman. Not at all, says Mr. Meredith; entirely the reverse. It is nothing but a "voracious æsthetic gluttony." "It has its foundation in the sensual," and this vast and dainty exacting appetite is lineally "the great-grandson of the Hoof." Why does he frantically demand this immaculate, this more than human bloom? It is the exaction of a gluttonous, sensual appetite. It is more than that; for him there must needs be fashioned "a perfect specimen designed for the elect of men." There the secret is out:

the demand is but another tentacle of that ink-spitting cuttlefish Egoism, which works uneasily in the mud of the human heart, and stretches itself on all sides in insatiable craving. "And," adds Mr. Meredith, "the capaciously strong in soul among women will ultimately detect an infinite grossness in the demand for purity infinite, spotless bloom." What you have supposed the demand of austerity is the passionate shriek of voluptuousness, and the strong-souled among women will find you out.

Mr. Meredith's satire allied to analysis is sometimes cruel, but when it is allied to humor it is delightful. It is then the smack of the sea-salt that gives edge to the sunny breeze. He can be droll, quaint, genial; he can jest and gambol like a boy or shout with Homeric laughter. He who has not read *Evan Harrington* has before him several hours of unmitigated laughter. For broad humor—in one or two instances a trifle too broad for good taste—it would be hard to surpass that memorable cricket supper at the Green Dragon, Fallowfield, and the eccentric behavior of John Raikes thereat. The hat of John Raikes

alone is provocative of infinite mirth. "I mourn my hat. He is old—I mourn him yet living. The presence of crape on him signifies he shall ne'er have a gloss again. The fact is my hat is a burden in the staring crowd. A hat like this should counsel solitude." In another spirit, but as genially humorous, is the famous description of Mrs. Caroline Grandison, in *Richard Feverel*. "She was a colorless lady, of an unequivocal character, living upon drugs, and governing her husband and the world from her sofa. Woolly Negroes blessed her name and whiskered John Thomases deplored her weight." She had rapidly produced eight daughters, and felt the solemnity of woman's mission. A son was denied her. Her husband, the quite unobjectionable gentleman, lost heart after the arrival of the eighth, and surrendered his mind to more frivolous pursuits. After that disappointing eighth she also lost heart and "relapsed upon religion and little dogs." But to give samples of Mr. Meredith's humor were an endless task. It runs through a hundred variations, from the keenest to the broadest; it smacks of Jingle and of Falstaff; it is sometimes roaring farce,

at others finished comedy; it is acute, genial, caustic; it is now hilarious with boyish buoyancy and good spirits, now the product of masculine good sense and piercing insight, now a shaft of laughter playing round a fountain of tears; and, widely as it differs, running through the gamut from the verbal quip to the profoundly human delineation, from merely comic to half-tragic laughter, it is a pervasive element, with which all his books are lavishly endowed. As a mere humorist Meredith is as superior to those ephemeral writers who pass as such to-day as is Shakespeare to Douglas Jerrold.

To Meredith, as to Thackeray, and with equal ignorance and lack of insight, the term cynic has been generally applied. If the cynic is he who sneers at good, then no man has less deserved the reproach. But when such terms are used no one stops to consider what they imply, and to call a man a cynic is the only refuge of Philistine mediocrity, which above all things dreads satire, and is afraid of being laughed at for not understanding what breeds laughter in others. I am willing to admit that there is sometimes a disagreeable flavor

in some of Meredith's scenes and phrases. One knows not how to define it, except to say that in such cases his robust masculinity touches in a fugitive fashion the verge of grossness. But of cynicism, of the spirit which mocks and derides, he has no trace; on the contrary, one is struck by the broad humanity of his writings, their essential buoyancy and good humor. And this is the more remarkable when we recollect that he has been condemned by the public to thirty years of almost total neglect, during which period he has had the mortification of seeing a score of writers with not a tithe of his genius press to the front and become the acknowledged representatives of English fiction. The *Ordeal* of George Meredith will make one of the most surprising chapters of that history of literature which our sons will write one day. For him, as for Browning, has been ordained a quarter of a century of deaf ears and mocking mouths; and how much does it say for the genuine greatness of each that they were able to keep a tranquil soul, an unembittered mind, and emerge from the cloud of neglect as the great optimists of their generation!

If we will take the trouble to analyze this so-called cynicism we shall see at once that its component elements are really moral intensity and love of "sacred reality." To tell the plain truth is often to say a bitter thing, and for a good many people any thing bitter is called cynical. And the supreme moral value of George Meredith's writing is its absolute witness to truth. He glosses over nothing. He sees clearly "the reddened sources" from which even the noblest passions spring. He is profoundly convinced that we can gain nothing in the long run by ignoring any element of truth about ourselves. To leave the body out of consideration in our epitome of man is as fatal a blunder as to ignore the soul. To collect only the finest qualities of a man or woman into a sort of odorous nosegay and call that human nature is to commit an outrage on justice. The earth grows weeds as well as flowers, and so does human nature. Let us have then the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; it will do us less harm to know every thing than to know only what it will please us best to know. That is the great lesson of his greatest book, *Richard Feverel*, and

never was a lesson taught with more impressive power. The system, as he derisively calls it, that marvelous system which is to produce a perfect youth by picking and choosing among the elements of things, by building walls here to close up dangerous paradises, and opening gate-ways there into sterile moral Saharas, by twisting this proclivity into grotesqueness, like a bruised vine upon a pole, and diverting the natural course of that taste or passion till it makes for itself feculent puddles instead of flowing purely in its natural bed—this system, carefully pieced together, mechanical, rigid, meant to mutilate life at every point, and produce perfection by mutilation, in the end works nothing but havoc, ruin, and death to all whom it concerns. And the secret of its failure lies in the fact that it is not based upon the truth of things. “Great is truth, and must prevail,” is the constant chant of George Meredith; and not less passionately than Carlyle does he perpetually affirm that truth is always wholesome, and a half-truth is the worst of lies.

The moral intensity of Meredith often becomes almost prophetic in its passion. “You cannot cheat nature,” he insists over and over

again. Nowhere in fiction is there a more tremendous sermon on the inevitable consequences of sin than in that chapter of *Richard Feverel* called "The Wild Oats Plea." Every youth should read it; it is a prophet's scroll to be thrust into his hand as he steps over the threshold of boyhood into the fullness of manhood. Sir Austin Feverel calls upon two ancient intimates, Lord Heddon and Darley Absworthy, "useful men though gouty, who had sown in their time a fine crop of wild oats, and advocated the advantage of doing so, seeing that they did not fancy themselves the worse for it." He found one with an imbecile son and the other with consumptive daughters. "So much," he wrote in his note-book, "for the wild oats theory!"

Darley was proud of his daughters' white and pink skins. Beautiful complexions, he called them. The eldest was in the market, immensely admired. There was something poetic about her. She intimated that she was robust, but toward the close of their conversation her hand would now and then travel to her side, and she breathed painfully an instant, saying, "Isn't it odd? Dora, Adela, and my-

self, we all feel the same queer sensation—about the heart; I think it is—after talking much.”

Sir Austin nodded and blinked sadly, exclaiming to his soul, “Wild oats! wild oats!”

Lord Heddon vehemently preached wild oats also. He was of opinion that a lad is all the better for a “little racketing when he’s green.” He had always found the best fellows were wildish once, etc.

“How’s your son?” asked Sir Austin.

“O, Lipscombe’s always the same,” replies the gouty advocate of wild oats. “He’s quiet—that’s one good thing; but there’s no getting the country to take him, so I must give up hopes of that.”

Lord Lipscombe entering the room just then, Sir Austin surveyed him, and was not astonished at the refusal of the country to take him.

“Wild oats! wild oats!” again thinks the baronet, as he contemplates the headless, degenerate, weedy issue and result.

He was content to remark that he thought the third generation of wild oats would be a pretty thin crop.

The Ordeal of Richard Feverel is a great book because it is a profoundly wise book. The wise books of the world, the books which embalm the deepest lessons of experience and thus attain to a sort of sacred value, are few, and thus become of necessity the classics of literature. This is such a book, and it is not only wise but witty, and is throughout executed in Mr. Meredith's most brilliant manner. There are sayings in it which cannot be forgotten: they are as memorable as the sayings of Gautama or Confucius, of Marcus Aurelius or Augustine, and might be the fit texts for great sermons.

Take, at random, some half a dozen sentences from that half-tragic note-book of Sir Austin's, *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, a book in which every record has the diamond's worth and luster, and, let us hope, the diamond's unchanging endurance, too.

How profoundly religious are these aphorisms:

"Expediency is man's wisdom. Doing right is God's."

"Until he has had some deep sorrow he will not find the divine want of prayer."

“Who rises from prayer a better man, his prayer is answered.”

“For this reason so many fall from God who have attained to him, that they cling to him with their weakness, not with their strength.”

And how keenly do these cut:

“Nature is not all dust. Through nature only can we ascend. St. Simeon saw the Hog in Nature, and took Nature for the Hog.”

“It is the tendency of very fast people to grow organically downward.”

“O, women, who like and will have for hero a rake! how soon are you not to learn that you have taken bankrupts to your bosoms, and that the putrescent gold that attracted you is the slime of the Lake of Sin!”

Or, to conclude with three that touch a sunnier height:

“The compensation for injustice is that in the darkest ordeal we gather the worthiest round us.”

“There is for the mind but one grasp of happiness; from that uppermost pinnacle of wisdom, whence we see that this world is well designed.”

And this most perfect of lovers' petitions :

"Give me purity to be worthy the good in her, and grant her patience to reach the good in me."

And these are but the chance gleanings of a book which it has taken all these years to lift into even moderate eminence, and which beyond its wisdom and its humor has every quality of art and genius which can make a novel great. The one consolation in the remembrance is that in this long ordeal of injustice George Meredith has not failed to gather the worthiest round him.

To catalogue qualities and speak of pathos, humor, and imagination, and make quotations is an easy task, but one feels that after all it amounts to little. The real greatness of George Meredith lies in something deeper and more inclusive ; it is that he is a great poet who has chosen chiefly to work in prose. His poetic force is behind all he writes ; it is the animating soul of all. It is perpetually thrusting aside the heavy garments of prose and flashing out upon us in thought and phrases which startle and fascinate us as only poetry can. How exquisite is that whole picture of Rich-

ard reading the diary of the dead Clare, with its secrecies of unconfessed affection, its pathetic humbleness, its meek reproach! "He could not read for tears. It was midnight. The hour seemed to belong to her. The awful stillness and the darkness were Clare's. Clare Doria Forey! He knew the music of that name. *It sounded faint and mellow now behind the hills of death.*" Is not this poetry, too—"He pronounced love a little modestly, as it were, a blush in his voice?"

When Sandra's song is finished the stillness settles back again "like one folding up a precious jewel." And where are there any passages in the whole realm of fiction so full of lyric rapture, so intoxicating in their charm of perfect beauty, as those which describe the first waking of love in Richard Feverel? George Meredith's greatest moments are in the interpretation of young love and nature, and here he does both.

"The little sky-lark went up above her, all song, to the smooth southern cloud lying along the blue; from a dewy copse standing dark over her nodding hat the blackbird flitted, calling to her with thrice mellow note; the

kingfisher flashed emerald out of the green osiers; a bow-winged heron traveled aloft, seeking solitude; a boat slipped toward her containing a dreamy youth."

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"Still and stiller grew nature, as at the meeting of two electric clouds."

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"To-morrow this place will have a memory—the river and the meadow, and the white falling weir. His heart will build a temple here, and the skylark will be its high-priest and the old blackbird its glossy-gowned chorister, and there will be a sacred repast of dew-berries. . . .

"Golden lie the meadows, golden run the streams, red gold is on the pine-stems. The sun is coming down to earth, and walks the fields and the waters.

"The sun is coming down to earth, and the fields and the waters shout to him golden shouts. He comes, and his heralds run before him and touch the leaves of oaks and planes and beeches lucid green, and the pine-stems redder gold, leaving brightest footsteps upon thickly weeded banks, where the foxglove's

last upper-bells incline, and bramble shoots wander amid moist rich herbage."

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"For this is the home of enchantment. Here, secluded from vexed shores, the prince and princess of the island meet; here, like darkling nightingales, they sit, and into eyes and ears and hands pour endless ever-fresh treasures of their souls."

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"Out in the world there, on the skirts of the woodland, a sheep-boy pipes to meditative eve on a penny whistle. Love's musical instrument is as old, and as poor; it has but two stops, and yet you see the cunning musician does thus much with it."

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"The tide of color has ebbed from the upper sky. In the west the sea of sunken fire draws back, and the stars leap forth and tremble and retire before the advancing moon, who slips the silver train of cloud from her shoulders, and with her foot upon the pine-tops surveys heaven.

"Young as when she looked upon the lovers in paradise, the fair Immortal journeys onward.

Fronting her it is not night, but veiled day. Full half the sky is flushed. Not darkness; not day; but the nuptials of the two.

“A soft beam travels to the fern covert under the pine-wood where they sit, and for answer he has her eyes—turned to him an instant, timidly fluttering over the depths of his, and then downcast; for through her eyes her soul is naked to him.

“‘Lucy! my bride! my life!’

“The night-jar spins his dark monotony on the branch of the pine. The soft beam travels round them and listens to their hearts. Their lips are locked.

“Pipe no more, Love, for a time! Pipe as you will, you cannot express their first kiss; nothing of its sweetness, and of the sacredness of it nothing. St. Cecilia up aloft, before the silver organ-pipes of paradise, pressing fingers upon all the notes of which Love is but one, from her you may hear it.”

Much more might be said, but here it becomes necessary to obey the limits of space, since this is an essay and not a treatise. The women-characters of George Meredith are worthy of an essay to themselves. They are

intensely living, and intensely human. It was one of Lord Byron's fads to pretend disgust at seeing women eat. It has been well said of George Meredith's women that they eat and are not ashamed. Woman is to him no sentimental abstraction, no impossible deity; it delights him to show us that she is flesh and blood, and none the worse for it; that in intellectual power she is mate of man, and in moral power his superior, because she lives closer to the heart of nature; that in fact the angel is as false a description as the animal, and that in any case the correcter our estimate of her the higher will be her honor. He will have nothing to do with the doctrine that woman is but "undeveloped man," and he roundly denounces it as a lie. The masculine and feminine are forever different in scope, sphere, and essence; yet men "who have the woman in them without being womanized are the pick of men. And the choicest women are those who yield not a feather of their womanliness for some amount of manlike strength—man's brain, woman's heart." She needs no spurious daintiness to recommend her. Let her come to us in native naturalness, and she will save

us; for "women have us back to the conditions of primitive man, or they shoot us higher than the topmost star." Again and again does George Meredith insist, as Mr. Le Gallienne admirably puts it, that "a man's relations to woman, how he regards her, how he acts toward her, are the most significant things about him." And for the man who misapprehends or misuses her there is tragic vengeance; "for women are not the end but the means of life, and they punish us for so perverting their uses. They punish society." But this theme can only be indicated, not elaborated.

The chief thing, from the moral point of view, which fills the mind after a thorough perusal of George Meredith's works is their robust hopefulness. He has gone down to the sources of life; he has uncovered its worst secrets; he has surprised the unsuspected and dragged into light the ignored elements of conduct; he has been utterly true in his fealty to "sacred reality," but he has retained, in and through all, his geniality, his faith in God and man, his hope for the world. He has told us that the only chance of happiness is the belief

that this world is well designed, and this is his own belief; and he adds through the lips of his Diana of the Crossways, "*Who can really think and not think hopefully?*" Like so many of his aphorisms, this is one that goes to the root of things and expresses a philosophy. It would seem to teach that pessimism is the disease of shallow minds, a surface complaint which attacks mainly the less forceful and efficient natures of the race; the wider and deeper natures have too strong a vitality to be its victims. Go deep enough, he says, and you will find that the sources of hope and vital joy are not dried up. You will find the world on the whole well designed. You will find no chaos, but a most Divine Kosmos, to know which is to rejoice in life. Despair is a disease; the sane and sound nature must needs be hopeful. A little thought, like a little knowledge, is a dangerous thing, and may breed pessimism. A little more thought takes one out of the storm-belt into the far-reaching sunlight. "*I think it al'ays the plan in a dielemmer,*" says the wise Mrs. Berry, "*to pray God and walk forward.*" Nor can any better plan be invented for the guidance of bewildered souls.

There is, of course, a thoughtless optimism, as there is a thoughtless pessimism—the optimism of those who recognize no problems or dilemmas in life, and whose gayety is the mere frisking ebullience of the happy animal. But the glory of George Meredith's optimism is that having seen the worst he believes in the best. Having touched the lowest depth, he has still had eyes to discover the starry height, and has had ears to hear the music of the spheres. In this resolute and intelligent optimism he and Robert Browning once more find themselves akin; nor can I better express the spirit of Meredith's work than by putting into his lips the well-known verse of Browning:

"I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw and I
spoke;
I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in my
brain
And pronounced on the rest of his handwork—returned him
again
His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I saw,
I report as a man may on God's work—*all's love, yet all's
law.*"

THE POETRY OF DESPAIR.

MATTHEW ARNOLD AND JAMES THOMSON (B. V.).

A LITTLE more than sixty years ago Lord Byron remarked to Medwin, in the course of those memorable conversations which passed between them at Pisa, that if a cry of blasphemy was raised against him on account of his drama of "Cain" it would be interesting to know what the Methodists at home would say to Goethe's "Faust." "What would they think of the colloquies of Mephistopheles and his pupil, or the more daring language of the Prologue, which no one will ever venture to translate?" It is curious and significant to remember how completely this prophecy has been falsified. At the very moment when Lord Byron was telling Medwin that the Prologue would never be translated Hayward was meditating his translation, and probably no poem has been so repeatedly rendered into English, or is more widely read to-day, than

the "Faust" of Goethe. Nor can it be said that any very violent shock was inflicted on the susceptibilities of British taste by either the grim pleasantry of the colloquies or the daring breadth of the Prologue. On the contrary, the publication of his rendering of "Faust" immediately won for Hayward attention and reputation, and those who had clamored loudest against Byron were wholly silent in the presence of Goethe. Nor was this strange silence to be attributed wholly, or indeed in any large degree, to the caprice of opinion or public indifference; it resulted rather from the great revolution which had taken place in the attitude of the age toward subjects of faith.

In no respect is this revolution more accurately reflected than in the new current of thought and feeling which is found in the poetry of the last half-century. It is the very nature of the poet that his finer sympathies should thrill with the first vibration of change, and that he himself should be at once the herald and the minister of change. He possesses the intellectual counterpart of that intensely sensitive physical organization which perceives

instinctively the earliest and slightest atmospheric indications of breaking weather, the moment when the summer breathes its first sick sigh of death or the spring first stirs and quickens in the frozen earth. Where he is absolutely true to himself and his instincts the poet thus becomes the most authentic voice of his age ; he condenses its spirit into concrete utterance, he interprets its truest yearnings, he catches the meaning of its deepest need, and so holds the mirror up to its inmost nature that in him coming generations recognize the true index to its character. The history of England is the history of its poetry, because its poetry is the quintessence of its real life. In it the rough kindliness and valor, the shallowness and lust, the ferment and bitterness, the confused doubt and yearning of any given epoch find their perfect reflection ; and a perfect acquaintance with the literature of a generation will afford a more accurate idea of its character than any narrative of parliamentary policies or warlike strategies.

No more striking illustration of such a truth as this can be furnished than by the entirely new vein of poetry which may be said to have

been opened up during the last fifty years in the direction of religious and theological problems. The beginning of the nineteenth century not merely witnessed the breaking up of political and social life throughout Europe, but, to a very large extent, a revolution against formulated theology, whose first effect was a quickened interest in the grave problems of human destiny. Byron himself is a case in point. The outcry against "Cain" and "Heaven and Hell" was aroused by the free and daring handling of such questions which those poems contained. It was in vain that Byron protested he had only followed in the steps of Milton, and that Milton neither attended divine service nor accepted the orthodox creeds of his day. It was instinctively felt that the fermenting leaven of an entirely new religious movement was at work in the mystery-plays of Byron. They were not the work of a great poetic artist who had found his inspiration in the "Paradise Lost," but the outcry of a living man in whom the spirit of the age was speaking, and who was inspired by the restless misery of religious doubt. The same spirit animated Shelley, whose professed

atheism was a mere form which masked the uncontrollable yearnings of one who

“ Stood between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born.”

The Tractarian movement of 1830 presaged and hastened the culmination of this unsettlement in belief, and, by proposing the Church as the one authority in faith, practically split the world of thought into two hostile camps. From that moment theological problems have had a paramount interest in English thought, and have deeply colored the whole course of modern literature, and most of all modern poetry. For the first time controversial points of faith, speculation, doubt, and despair have afforded themes for poets. Arthur Hugh Clough, who describes himself as for a long while drawn like a straw up the draught of a chimney by the force of the Oxford movement, came out of it completely lamed and wrecked, and uttered the wail of thousands when he wrote :

“ O, might we for assurance' sake
Some arbitrary judgment take,
And willfully pronounce it true.”

The “ Festus ” of Bailey was charged to the

very brim with the like unrest and heart-wearied yearning. The melodious languors of Tennyson's early poems soon gave way to the deep-centered activities of thought which were every-where rending men's lives apart, and the golden clime in which the poet was born was speedily vexed with the rolling cloud and tempest of the great upheaval. The "In Memoriam" is the nineteenth century's Book of Job, and is inseparably inwoven with the history of the century because it is woven out of the sentiment of the century. The best poetry which Matthew Arnold has written is saturated with the same sentiment, but in its weariness is the saddest of all the lyrical cries which have pierced the times. In Robert Browning, above all, the movement has found its climax, for no English poet has so consistently used poetry as the vehicle of theological speculation, and few out of darkness and perplexity have sung so high and clear a song.

Together with the effect of the religious movement on poetry we have to take into consideration the character of modern life in itself. Is there any thoughtful man who is not conscious of the enormous overstrain, the fever-

ish and almost diseased activity which competition of all kinds has imported into human life? One of our poets has painted his vision of the world as seen from some point of central calm:

“ Like a vast wheel that spins through humming air,
And time, life, death, are sucked within its breath,
And thrones and kingdoms like sere leaves are hurled
Down to its maelstrom ; for its wind of death
Sweeps the wide skies, and shakes the flaring suns,
So fast the wheel spins, and the glory runs.”

Might not the immense whirl and speed of modern life be represented as the blind spinning of a huge wheel, or a maelstrom sending forth deep thunder, into whose fatal circles life, and all that is best in life, are being rapidly swept? It is Matthew Arnold who tells us of the two desires that toss about the poet's blood :

“ One drives him to the world without,
And one to solitude.”

But where is this healing solitude? Or how indeed can the simple tastes which thrive best in its seclusion and its silence be preserved amid the growth of cities, the haste to be rich, the competition of trade, the pressure and overstrain to which it seems inevitable that all classes of society must submit in this day of

ours? Here there is a double process, producing more and more with each decade that note of deep despair which is now beginning to be apparent in poetry. On the one hand we have the wide disturbance of faith, producing confusion and sterility in poetry; on the other hand we have the diseased activity of modern life communicating itself to literature and revenging itself in that cry of hopeless weariness and incommunicable sadness which is almost the foremost, and certainly the most distressing, quality of modern poetry. It is one of the axioms of pessimism that "development of culture is development of sorrow," and indeed, finally, that all things lead up to the transcendental misery of the Absolute himself. Is this the grim goal toward which modern poetry is drifting? Is culture without faith proving itself only the development of sorrow, and are we thus being led through agnosticism to despair?

It has been said that poetry is faith, and though something of accuracy may have been sacrificed to the exigences of epigram, yet we may accept the definition as at least high and noble. Without faith no man shall see God,

and without that vision of God no poet can accomplish aught of noble or divine. He must make his life a poem, he must live ever as in his great Task-master's eye. Whoever else may be disquieted in vain, he who sings must know in whom he has believed. I have shown that the greatest periods of English poetry have been the periods of religious faith; it is worth pondering that the earliest forms of poetry are essentially religious. Have we forgotten this unalterable relation between poetry and religion? Have we forgotten the rock from which were hewn the noblest forms of poetry, the trees of life whose leaves have been for the healing of the nations? Or at least, it may be urged, have we invented, or discovered, or evolved any poetic ideal half so noble as this that lives forever in the stern and simple speech of Milton? It is quite certain that he who forgets these things forgets the things that are for his peace. The greatest poets are unanimous against him. The minstrel strikes deep heart-notes because he has high visions; the mightiest singers have been made mighty by their faith. He cannot weave imperishable singing raiment from the

broken woofs of faithlessness; he cannot pour the poet's highest music, nor any music other than a discord or a wail, through the thin reed of contemporary agnosticism. For the highest art calmness and sanity of spirit are needed; indeed, these are its most stringent and unalterable conditions. There must be unity of thought in the poet; there must be a divine center round which the thought may gather. If it be otherwise, if there be nothing true and nothing sure, if the blood is always at fever-heat and the thought in a perpetual flux, what song he shall sing will have at best only the piercing sweetness and sad incoherence of a snatch of music sung by wild lips in a delirium. For the strenuous and abiding tasks of the highest art, for a "Paradise Lost" or an "Excursion," the mind will have no vigor and impulse of sustained effort. And it was this that Shelley felt when he wrote to Godwin: "I cannot but be conscious, in much of what I write, of an absence of that tranquillity which is the attribute and accompaniment of power." It is this which is felt and unwittingly confessed by the poets of our own day. They are too far removed from a secure basis

of faith, and too much disturbed by the fierce haste of life, to possess that tranquillity which is the attribute and accompaniment of power. How, indeed, can tranquillity be the possession of men whose confession rather than whose creed is: "Here we drift, like white sail across the wild ocean, now bright on the wave, now darkling in the trough of the sea. But from what port did we sail? Who knows? Or to what port are we bound? Who knows? There is no one to tell us but such poor weather-tossed mariners as ourselves, whom we speak as we pass. . . . But what know they more than we?"

There is another element which has contributed to the creation of a poetry of despair, namely, the failure of modern culture as a substitute for religious faith. Here pessimism comes much nearer the truth than positivism, for Hartmann, in his *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins*, shows that the augmentation of happiness by culture has been "dearly purchased by an overwhelmingly greater amount of sorrow, necessarily called into being by the process." It has been said that culture has "invaded even the nurseries of young

children ; and the culturists rejoice at the sight of crowds of little wretches, of eight years old and under, cramming for competitive examinations." At all events, it is true enough that the zeal for culture, either in the limited sense of these passages, or in the larger meaning of the word, has become a devouring passion in the late decades of the nineteenth century. Now, no one will doubt that there is a broad and noble culture perfectly consonant with a devout and spiritual faith. In point of fact there can be no breadth or nobility in a culture which does not include the spirit and the character as well as the intellect. Such culture is not purchased by an overwhelmingly greater amount of sorrow ; rather it adds "sunshine to daylight," it completes and enlarges the circle of being, it is the golden stair up which men climb to a place but little lower than the angels. But this is not the culture of which Hartmann speaks ; it is not the culture whose arrogant and self-sufficient spirit breathes in our literature to-day. Modern culture knows nothing of a place a little lower than the angels ; it dismisses with contempt what it chooses to call unverifiable beliefs ; it has no

spiritual vision, and is the antagonist rather than the handmaiden of faith. It has endeavored to fill a part too vast for its powers, by substituting itself for faith, and it has failed. Could the result be otherwise? What does culture without faith do but create with each step in its progress fresh needs, and so aggravate its thirst and multiply its sorrows—surely, in a very striking sense, the sorrows of those that seek after a strange God? For the experiment is not new; it has been made many times, and once at least, on a scale of unparalleled tragedy, by a certain king who was wisest among men, and a great poet withal, who had houses and treasure more than all they that had been before him in Jerusalem, and had delights of knowledge, and of art, and of pleasure, and knew wisdom and madness and folly, and so came at last to say that all was vanity, and the one supreme peace and wisdom was found in the remembering of the Creator. But the lesson has not yet sunk deep into the ears of his generation; and so the failure of culture as a substitute for religious faith has worked like a bitter leaven in the poetry of the age, and has produced despair.

Let us turn to Matthew Arnold again. His poetry is virtually the confession that his culture has failed. In him the personal note is supreme; it is the problem of his own life which fascinates us. He can strike chords of great power and sweetness, and sometimes of deep tenderness, but he is greatest as a poet when he expresses his own heartfelt mournfulness and yearning. The two worlds he stands between are the old world of faith which is dead, and the new world of culture which is "powerless to be born." He cannot hide his sorrow, it is ever before him; he cannot disguise the fact that his culture has failed to satisfy him. He cries with an exceeding bitter cry after that cross which he has declared a vanished myth and that assured creed which he has dismissed as a beautiful imposture. He confesses the cruel conflict that is within him, the devoutness which has survived his doubts, the religious yearnings which are not quenched by his denials. In this respect his position is unique; he sings as one believing in his unbelief, and he is only saved from utter despair by this devoutness which he has not dared to destroy. But beyond that the most memora-

ble feature of his poetry is its acknowledgment—wrung from him rather than confessed—that his lack of faith has sapped the very courses of his thought, and that culture in its utmost beauty and refinement has proved itself but shifting sand when the storms have beaten and the winds of trouble blown. He sees with dismay and despair the hopeless tangle of the age, and is as one without hope. He is smitten with the intellectual fever of the times, and cries:

“What shelter to grow ripe is ours,
What leisure to grow wise?”

The failure of faith, the failure of culture, the unrest and haste of life, find perfect expression in his pages; for he is too true a poet, and too real a man, not to deal sincerely with those to whom he appeals. And so the music of his speech, in spite of its exquisite charm and tenderness, deepens more and more into the lyric wail of immeasurable distress, and it is with wistful yearning he looks back to the stronger poets of the past, and cries:

“Too fast we live, too much are tried,
Too harassed to attain
Wordsworth’s sweet calm, or Goethe’s wide
And luminous view to gain.”

That is to say, he has not the impassivity and selfishness of Goethe, which makes mere personal culture an all-sufficing purpose; and still less has he the undisturbed and simple faith of Wordsworth, which makes tranquillity a natural consequence.

And since Matthew Arnold himself has pointed us to Wordsworth, and indicated him as one of the only two who in our troubled day have attained "to see their way," it may be well to ask what preserved Wordsworth from the disease of pessimism, which had already tainted English poetry, while he lived and thought? How was it that amid the fever of the age he continued to live—to quote his own exquisite words—

"With heart as calm as lakes that sleep,
In frosty moonlight glistening;
Or mountain rivers where they creep
Along a channel smooth and deep
To their own far-off murmurs listening."

It was because he preserved his faith in God, his simple tastes, his love of nature. He was content to lose his life that he might save it; or, in other words, to be true to the things unseen and eternal at whatever sacrifice of the things seen and temporal. It may be that he

provokes ridicule by his occasional triviality of theme ; but this is one of the penalties of fame—that the tares are bound up with the wheat of genius, and that the shallow and the unwise will never learn how to discriminate between them. It may be true that the more turbulent and volcanic passions of human nature find no reflection in his writings ; but the nobler aspects of human destiny continually absorb him, and in this the poet has chosen that “better part” which shall make his best poetry immortal. What he has succeeded in doing is the rare and difficult task of uniting the Christian and the philosophic genius in poetry which, at its best, is full of charm, simplicity, and sublimity. He has preserved that faith in God which is the secret of all tranquillity, and without which the greatest poetry cannot be. He has turned aside with a noble disdain from the strifes of secular ambition, the greed for gold, the race for fame, and so has preserved “the harvest of a quiet eye,” and found that

“Impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.”

And because he did this he also preserved the clearness and sanity of his spirit ; he was kept

in peace, he was tainted with no morbid disquietudes; he sang no dirges of despair, but a sweet high strain of purest song which has been for the healing and the inspiration of his country, and which will endure in gathered power when the bitter cries of our modern singers are lost in oblivion or are remembered only with sorrowful disdain. Just as Milton has been pictured standing like a colossal statue of Apollo, watching the arrow-flight of his immortal song, while round his feet, unconscious of his presence, dance the wine-stained satyrs of the court of Charles, so we may figure Wordsworth standing on the threshold of this perturbed generation of ours, clothed in his simplicity, rebuking its fretful strife with his serenity and its despairing voices with his faith.

How far we have removed from Wordsworth, and how foreign the spirit of our later poetry is to the spirit which animated his, we can judge by one of the latest contributions made to our literature, the poetry of James Thomson, long known as "B. V." In the "City of Dreadful Night" despair has reached its apotheosis. The ultimatum of pessimism is

universal suicide, and that is precisely the doctrine propounded in this remarkable poem. I will not attempt to determine with critical dogmatism the position of Thomson as a poet ; it would be easy to exaggerate or underrate his importance ; but the significance of such a poem, dedicated to Leopardi, approved by George Eliot, widely read, full of

“ Infections of unutterable sadness,
Infections of incalculable madness,
Infections of incurable despair,”

it is at least well to indicate. And the significance of Thomson's poetry is that it pushes to logical fulfillment those conditions of religious disturbance and intellectual unrest which we have already noted. Here, at last, is a man too high-minded to chant the praises of the “Goddess of Lubricity” because he has lost religious assurance, and too terribly sincere to be content with mere wailings of regret for a faith whose poetry fascinates him, but whose authenticity he derides ; he therefore strikes the iron harp-string of the completest pessimism, and not merely announces his conclusion that life is not worth living, but that it ought not to be preserved.

When Thomson called the "City of Dreadful Night" an atheistical poem he spoke with a perfect appreciation of its scope and purpose. There could be no other word for a poem whose climax of horror is found in the picture of that black-draped cathedral crowded with human shadows, with its swart preacher whose eyes burn beneath his somber cowl, proclaiming as the best of all good tidings:

"O, brothers of sad lives ! that are so brief,
A few short years must bring us all relief,
Can we not bear these years of laboring breath ?
But if you would not this poor life fulfill,
Lo, you are free to end it when you will,
Without the fear of waking after death."

But Thomson is, nevertheless, a memorable example of how difficult and even impossible it is to construct poetry out of pure negation. We are reminded of the caustic epigram of Voltaire, that if God did not exist we should be obliged to invent him, and of the saying of Coleridge, that a poet is always a religious man. In spite of all avowed atheism Thomson finds himself writing in fierce condemnation of—

"The poets who sing their own lusts
Instead of the hymns of the Lord."

and declaring with more of a prophet's fervor than a pessimist's stoicism—

“No wealth can bribe away the doom of the living God ;
No haughtiest strength confront the sway of his chastening
rod.”

God refuses to be exiled from the heart, though shut out from the brain of the poet ; and ever and again a gush of pure faith, like the song of a thrush heard between the thunder-claps of a dying storm, rises through the darkness of his despair. Especially is this the case when his stormy anguish of revolt against social and theological order gives place to the sadness of personal regret. His eyes then fill with tears when looking on life's autumn fields and thinking of the days that are no more. With inimitable pathos, and scarcely less inimitable daring, he recalls the one spirit he loved upon earth ; and, as in the poem of “Vane's Dream,” alternately thrills the reader with his tenderness and offends him with his coarse realism. And, indeed, in this respect, Thomson resembles Heine, for whom he entertained a deep affection, and from whom he has manifestly caught inspiration. His satire and tenderness follow each other with swift strokes :

the secret of his own life-long agony is often guarded by a spirit of mocking laughter, and when we least expect it a turn of the page flashes sudden sunlight through the gloom. As with Heine so with him, there is often something sadder in his laughter than his weeping, and his very irony pains us with suggestions of the tears that are behind it. We know while we read many poets that their sweetest songs spring from saddest thought; that, like the Pot of Basil, celebrated in Boccaccio's story and Keats's poem, the sweet bloom and foliage which astonish Florence owe their fullness to the secret death that lies below. But in Thomson the sense of pain often becomes overmastering; and, for pity's sake, we pray to hear no more. It must ever be a startling paradox that such bitterness and pathos, such denial and faith, can exist in the same nature; that the "Mater Tenebrarum," whose cry after the dead is worthy of comparison with Burns's wail to his "Mary in Heaven," should be written by the same hand as "The Doom of a City," and "The City of Dreadful Night."

It would be interesting to point out how Thomson, without being imitative, occasion-

ally can almost rival Shelley and surpass Blake upon their own ground. In such poems as "The Naked Goddess," with its mysterious symbolism and spiritual reticence, and "Virtue and Vice," with the satiric simplicity of its short and epigrammatic lines, Thomson has caught the very spirit of Blake's method and utterance. In his longest poems the influence of Shelley is unmistakable, and it is a grave error of judgment that the editor of the posthumous volume should have omitted Thomson's poem on Shelley, which could not but be of biographic interest at least, and have included such clever rubbish as "The Pilgrimage of St. Nicotine," which was only written to sell. In the love of cloud-scenery, and the faithful painting of it; in all those large effects of weirdness and solemnity which make sunrises and sunsets so full of awe and mystery; in the poetry of wonder and desolation, Thomson is a master, and he has studied Shelley to good purpose. Shelley himself has not painted a sunset with a finer apprehension of those large effects of light and meaning, as opposed to those exquisite touches of minute observation, in which Tennyson, for instance, abounds, than

has Thomson in the following extract from
“The Doom of a City:”

“ And so, at length, we entered it, and faced
The thin, dark lines of countless masts, all traced
Upon the saddest sunset ever seen—
Spread out like an interminable waste
Of red and saffron sand, devoured by slow
Persistent fire ; beneath whose desolate glow
A city lay—thick-zoned with solemn green
Of foliage massed upon the steeps around.
Between those mast-lines flamed the crystal fires
Of multitudinous windows, and on high
Grand marble palaces and temples, crowned
With golden domes and radiant towers and spires,
Stood all entranced beneath that desert sky,
Based on an awful stillness.”

But Thomson has sufficient original force to stand by himself, and to be judged alone. What that judgment will be it is of course difficult to predict. But if it be a true axiom of criticism that a poet's greatness is in precise proportion to his power in pure imagination, then he must take a very high place in contemporary poetry. The greatest master of the poetry of pure wonder which English literature has ever had is undoubtedly Coleridge. There is a subtle charm and magic, a witchery of sound and vision, in such poems as “*Khubla Khan*” and “*Christabel*” which has never been

approached by any other English poet; and "The Ancient Mariner" still remains the most splendid effort of pure imaginative poetry in modern literature. There has, indeed, been an attempt to claim for Keats the place next to Coleridge in the poetry of wonder, on the strength of his fragment called "The Eve of St. Mark's," and his single ballad "La Belle Dame sans Merci." But we fail entirely to perceive any indications in either of these poems of that clear and vivid faculty of intense imagination which is indispensable in romantic or supernatural poetry. The second place must clearly be assigned to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose "Blessed Damozel," whether considered in itself according to its qualities of intense passion, spirituality, and imaginativeness, or as the work of a youth of eighteen, may be said to stand alone in modern poetry. And after these two, at a great distance, and as a poet of wholly different temper and method, we should be compelled to name James Thomson. Compared with either Coleridge or Rossetti he falls very short in the qualities where they are supreme; but he possesses an imaginative intensity, a Dantesque power of vision, and a

mastery over the imagery of gloom and fear, which is a distinct and rare endowment. At his word magic curtains of inwoven darkness rush down out of the brightest heavens, and every chord of sense vibrates with secret dread. Let any one read such a poem as "In the Room," with its dreadful realism and gradual terror, or the poem called "Insomnia" in the posthumous volume, and he will know what we mean. The vision we see through the eyes of the sleepless man—and here the sufferer was Thomson himself—of the slant moonlight on the ceiling thrown, mixed with the faint and broken lamp-gleam; the Hours standing one by one at the bed's foot, each one—

"Still, as a pillar of basaltic stone,
And all enveloped in a somber shroud,
Except the wan face, drooping, heavy-browed ;"

and the weary space between the tolling bells, like an awful desert to be crossed in fear and pain—has the distinctness and the haunting memory of nightmare. And here, as in "The City of Dreadful Night," he proves himself a master of meter and of a sort of deep, intoned, inward music, like the heavy rise and fall of immense seas, which is perhaps the

secret of the indefinable charm which lures us on in spite of our aversion.

Thomson has spoken in "The Doom of a City" of the mysteriousness of his own life, and has said :

"The chords of sympathy, which should have bound me
In sweet communion with earth's brotherhood
I drew in tight and tighter still around me,
Strangling my best existence for a mood."

The implication is that he was not unconscious of that growth of melancholy which shrouded his whole life in gloom, and that he deplored it. At times, too, he must have overcome it. There are times when the very spirit of joy sings through his lips and his verse has the swift rush and sweetness of a bird's song. He possessed lyrical power of no common order, and had the rare faculty of writing songs which sing themselves to their own music. And in one lovely poem in his last volume, entitled "He Heard Her Sing," he manifests a sustained power and volume of lyrical sweetness such as it would be hard to match among any of the younger writers of the day. No more impassioned song of love and spring has ever been sung in our times; and this poem alone would

stamp Thomson as a poet of very high order. But such moods are rare, and are all too brief. They are signs of what he might have done had his life been happier, and had that mood, of which he speaks, not tightened round him its strangling death-cord; as it is he stands in modern literature like his own vision of the sleepless hour—

“Still, as a pillar of basaltic stone,
And all enveloped in a somber shroud.”

Here then is the acutest form of that faithlessness which is the malady of the age; here is its latest and, let us hope, its ultimate development. Thomson has produced and bequeathed to the world a genuine poetry of despair, which in power, splendor, and earnestness is entirely unique. We emphasize its perfect genuineness because it is not to be confounded for a moment with that fashionable poetic agnosticism which appears unto men to fast, and is never so happy as when persuading every body else that it is exquisitely miserable. Thomson's poetry is too terribly sincere, and its profound gloom and bitterness are too manifestly the product of despair in its most forlorn and hopeless phase. The bound-

ary of doubt is long since left behind, and the city of dreadful night which he has reached is the realm of pure negation. It might be said in defense of what Tennyson has called honest doubt that the sincere questioning of accepted formulæ is not without service to the cause of truth. Had Galileo never doubted the scientific deductions of his day, nor Columbus the accepted geography, nor Luther the conventional dogmas of the Church, the world might have gone on for another century or two without a true astronomy, an America, or a Reformation. Such skepticism doubts its way toward certainty, and comes at length to find a stronger faith its own. But Thomson is not one of the great world-teachers who, "fired with burning sense of God and right," doubts men's doubts away. He is a man who has broken down in the quest, who has sought the Holy Grail in vain, who at last, hopeless of seeing any divine light "starlike mingle with the stars," has laid himself down in the unending forest, and is choked with the thick drift of darkness which every way falls upon him like the black snow of death. He has no questions to put to the oracle of doom; he

has received his answer, and here records his belief that life is

“Darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is.”

The accent of regret, which makes the poetry of Arnold so pathetic in the very calmness of its hopelessness, is almost wanting. Thomson does not tell us how

“The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled ;
But now I only hear
Its melancholy long-withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.”

Regret is a still sad music, whose key-note is plaintiveness; but the predominating quality in Thomson's verse is a sort of sonorous thunder, an awful and majestic music, which might aptly be likened to the long-withdrawing roar of breakers on the naked shingles of the world, when the mood of ocean is mighty rather than melancholy.

In one brief poem, entitled “A Recusant,” he has indeed touched a tender and regretful chord, and, looking at the church-spire “lifted

mysterious through the twilight glooms," has cried :

"How sweet to enter in, to kneel and pray
With all the others whom we love so well,
All disbelief and doubt might pass away,
All peace float to us with its Sabbath bell."

But this is a rare and casual mood, a moment of tenderness after long weeping, which in no wise represents his habitual thought. For equally wanting in him is that accent of forlorn faith which every-where quivers through the conflict of the "In Memoriam," and rises to its sublimest utterance in the famous fifty-fifth section, where the believing but bewildered doubter cries :

"I falter where I firmly trod,
And fall with all my weight of cares
Upon the world's great altar-stairs ·
Which slope through darkness up to God."

For him there are no sloping altar-stairs gleaming upward through the darkness, and the darkness is impenetrable and past all hope of morning. He himself, as we have shown, clearly apprehended and rightly described the purpose of his most remarkable poem, when he called "The City of Dreadful Night" an atheistical writing. Those who knew him

best fully understood the completeness of that despair which consumed him, when they printed on his funeral card his own lines, full of the bitterest pathos and hopelessness :

“Weary of erring in this desert life,
Weary of hoping hopes forever vain,
Weary of struggling in all-sterile strife,
Weary of thought which maketh nothing plain,
I close my eyes and calm my panting breath,
And pray to thee, O, ever-quiet death !
To come and soothe away my bitter pain.”

Thomson may be described as the Poe of English poetry, and in many respects there is a singular likeness between the two men. Both were lonely and embittered, both knew the early loss of love, both chose to dwell on the weird borderland of imaginative terror, both were victims of intemperance, both died in hospital, and both were smitten with the same immeasurable hopelessness.

It may be added that in both Poe and Thomson there is not merely the same distinction of style, the same power of melody and vein of weirdness, but the same remoteness and intangibility of theme. It might easily be shown, and as regards Thomson it is obvious enough, that it is quite possible for a poet

to be at once a master of realism and supernaturalism ; but in both poets the supernaturalism is in excess. For this reason neither will ever appeal to mankind at large. It is the fault and almost the disease of modern poets that they perplex themselves to discover abstruse themes, and recondite fragments of history, as proper subjects for the exercise of their art, when in truth the finest of all themes for poetry, like the flowers, lie at their very feet, in the actual human life which beats its music out around them. Judging Thomson from a purely critical stand-point, we are bound to own that his poetry will assuredly suffer at the hands of time through this defect of theme ; although, on the other hand, it may be said that the personal interest which attaches to all that he has written will do much to allure those whom his remoteness will repel.

There, however, likeness between Poe and Thomson ceases and difference begins. Thomson has none of Poe's heartless insincerity. He does not trade in anguish. He is utterly incapable of the vanity Poe manifested when he strove to prove the music of his "Raven" a mere artistic trick, and, by inference,

his despair a mere histrionic feat. Moreover, while Poe is simply a meteoric genius, a wandering star, a man cursed and ruined by his own follies, and without significance as regards his times, Thomson's great claim to notice is the fact that he is a portent, full of grave significance to those who study the character of the times in the character of their literature. He began his lessons in pessimism while a mere lad under the tuition of Mr. Charles Bradlaugh; he graduated in despair under the life-long influences of secularism. Poverty and misfortune may have had much to do with the souring of his nature and the ruin of his life. But there have been many men of loftier genius than his who have borne the full weight of both, and have come out of the discipline of sorrow not merely chastened, but strengthened. He himself has sung in praise of William Blake, the poet-painter, who

"Came to the desert of London town,
Mirk miles broad;
He wandered up, and he wandered down,
Ever alone with God."

Did he remember while he wrote the poem that the man he praised never earned more

than daily bread during all his long hard life, and yet died singing rapturous hymns? Did he remember how men before and after Blake's time had borne the same slings and arrows of outrageous fortune? how Samuel Johnson had taken fifteenpence for a day's work in literature, and Goldsmith had drudged in Grub Street all his life, and Carlyle had lived and thought on oatmeal for many a month in a Scotch garret, and yet had none of them cursed God and died?

It was not the misfortune and hardship of Thomson's life which produced his pessimism. Others have borne as much, and yet have come out victorious. It was because in all that desert of London town he was not alone with God; because he had settled it with himself that "there was no hint of good" throughout the universe; because, in fact, for him there was no God, that the darkness closed down upon him while it was yet day, and out of that mist of thick blackness the only voice which reached his fellows was a voice of heart-broken misery, of complete and tragic failure.

To such a point, then, in one direction, have we come in the development of modern poetry.

Goethe in his day foresaw and foretold the growth of a "literature of despair," and his prediction is fulfilled. The causes for this perilous development I have endeavored to indicate; they are to be found in the new current of theological speculation which affected poetry in the beginning of the century, in the wide disturbance of faith which ensued, in the failure of culture as a substitute for religious faith, and, finally, in the overstrain of life which is characteristic of the times in which we live. Simplicity and sanity are qualities which have been gradually dying out of English poetry for many a year, and the morbid, the sensational, the exaggerated, have taken their places. The pages of even our greatest poets bear evidence of the influence of religious disquiet, and it is rare that the query of doubt is not stated with far greater force and effect than the rejoinder of faith. If poetry has any ministry at all in the world, if it be not a merely ornamental art, if it be at all what Milton said it was, and what Wordsworth proved it was, a gift of God, capable of great and holy service for mankind, it must be evident that we have shamefully misused the gift, or that our

conception of its uses and Milton's are very different indeed. At all events, there can be no question which estimate has resulted in the noblest poetry, from whose lips has come the deathless singing. When Milton told his friends how he lay awake at night, waiting for God to touch his thoughts to music, he revealed the only source of great poetry ; for if inspiration is not given to modern seers and singers, illumination is, and from God descends every good and perfect gift. That is the lesson which we need to learn to-day. The way of reform is in the direction of Milton and Wordsworth. We must regain our lost simplicity of life, the old and fruitful discipline of "plain living and high thinking." We must refuse to barter solitude and calm for any glittering baubles which may be snatched from the fierce race of life lived at fever-heat. In a word, our poets must return to Nature, must return to God ; and when the old sweet faith grows strong again the new despair will vanish and the garments of heaviness give place to the singing-robcs of praise.

For the whole secret of the restlessness and bitter thought of our times is that their moral

attitude is one of blind and arrogant revolt against the sacred ancient order of the world. We have scorned the limitations of human intelligence, as we are now scorning the very limitations of wholesome human life itself. It is time we were reminded that there are points of knowledge beyond which we may not go, and laws of life which we dare not violate. What shall it profit us that we have swept the skies with our telescopes and counted the stars of heaven on our charts if in the intoxication of our knowledge we forget that those golden fires of night were lighted by One who is manifold in power, and that in wisdom he hath made them all? It is a right proud boast that we have beckoned the lightning and it has come, running our errands and bearing our messages on wings swifter than the wind; but small gain is ours if our days are henceforth devoured with haste, and the stolen fire of Jupiter becomes a perilous possession, and is well avenged upon the hands that stole it. What recompense is there for the loss of reverence? What gain is worthy to be counted against that immense disaster which has uprooted the sobriety and calm of life, which has

robbed us of our leisure and destroyed the very power of contemplation? *Quest and Vision* I have ventured to call this little book, because life itself is a perpetual quest, and the noblest results of life and literature are but so many visionary glimpses into the solemn mystery and beauty which lie inscrutable around us and fold us like an atmosphere. But in all such quest there must be reverence, and not less there must be room for rest and silence. There must be knowledge of ignorance as well as thirst for wisdom ; space for thought as well as time for speech ; bowers of greenwood where Sir Galahad may rest and pray, as well as grim wastes where the foul foe hovers and the battle waits ; and the Holy Grail floats nearest when the world is hushed, and the secret of God is manifest alone to those who do his will. That divine vision is not revealed to the presumptuous pride of half-enlightened ignorance, nor to the irreverent haste of trivial and pretentious curiosity. We want, as Mrs. Browning said forty years ago, the touch of Christ's hand upon our poets, that their dead forms of art may live and that they may know how to expound "agony into renova-

tion." But that divine hand is not upon our poets, they have not found rest unto their souls; and hence the agony of the age has been expounded, but not the renovation.

Meantime let us be sure that we are just now only pausing in an interval. The fountain of high poetry is not dried up for England. Its volume as it flows within our view is lessened and contracted, but it only runs low for a time, after the manner of intermittent springs. Even now under ground—unknown as yet by us—it may be gathering up its supplies. In the days of Byron and Shelley, some seventy years ago, Wordsworth was held in contempt, and it seemed as if impiety ruled the realm of poetry. Yet how much since then of deep religious utterance, of pure and reverential meditation and aspiration, has been poured forth in high, rich strains of verse! Tennyson's day is not quite gone, and his has not been the music of despair. Browning's perplexities and paradoxes have opened forth into fruit of faith and worship. Myers is a true and high poet, whose work outshines in beauty the lurid splendors of the poetry of despair. Lewis Morris may not be a great poet,

but he is in the true poetic succession, and may well be joined with Myers as showing the continuity of the tradition of faith among our contemporary poets. Yet a little while and greater names will prolong through after years the still growing galaxy of the poets of faith and holy awe, of reverence and hope and love. It cannot be that the great music of English poetry shall end only in despair. The heavenly sweetness of the song of Ariel seems lost ; but we mourn not as those without hope, for even while we cry with Ferdinand, "'Tis gone," behold the air thrills again with magical vibration, and there is heard the faint prophetic cadence of a new song, divine and glorious as the olden, heralding the coming ages, and we cry also with Ferdinand, "No ; it begins again !"

THE END.

